

**PWI TURNS 30! A 31-PAGE CELEBRATION**

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

# PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED®

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**RANDY ORTON**  
Wrestler Of  
The Half-Year

## Mid-Year Report

- Mid-Year Awards
- Top 50 Stories
- Wacky, Weird
- PPV Reviews
- Predictions
- Grades

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# from the desk of...

**W**HEN I SAT down at my desk in the G.C. London Publishing Corporation office in Freeport, Long Island, on July 23, 1979, Nostradamus himself could not have convinced me that 30 years later (through three moves and three different owners) I would still have the same job. I didn't plan for that to happen.

Truth is, I didn't really plan at all. Sure, I began training for the job when I was 15 years old, publishing my own wrestling newsletter, and I continued the learning process while in college at SUNY Stony Brook, working endless hours for my collegiate newspaper and part-time for *Newsday* while squeezing in a few hours for classes. But I never laid out a detailed plan for my career.

There were times when I thought I should be "progressing to the next level," as each of my co-workers eventually did. But then I would ask myself, "What do I really want from my career?" And you know what? I came to the realization that I had it all: a job where I can lead a talented group of writers, editors, and artists, a position that allowed me to focus on my greatest strength—editing—while still allowing me to write, a subject matter that never gets boring, and a few other niceties, such as a short commute, regular working hours, and, of course, the ability to make a decent living.

So, for me, this issue marks a dual celebration, that of *PWI*'s 30-year anniversary and my own. Having been with the magazine for all but the first two issues and having been at the helm for the past 22 years, I have seen the magazine grow from its infancy to adulthood. And while I am starting to feel the effects of age, I feel the magazine is in its prime and getting better. That's not only a testament to the current full-time staffers, editors Frank Krewda and Jeff Ruoss and designers David Romanosky and Joe Rogan, but everyone who preceded them and nurtured the product along the way. I refer in particular to four men: Peter King (my predecessor, friend, and mentor), Bill Apter (the face and conscience of this company for 25 years), Ken Morgan (who gave *PWI* its personality through his design work), and Craig Peters (whose innovative mind continually re-directed the magazine's path).

Space does not permit me to acknowledge all the fine men and women with whom I have worked, nor the richly talented freelance contributors who are every bit as much a part of the *PWI* family as those who work in the office. I owe so much to them for what they have added not only to the pages of *PWI*, but also to my life.

I joke with my young co-workers that while they were crapping in their diapers, I was writing and editing many of the issues of *PWI* that now sit in our archive binders. It's sort of a funny thought, but it keeps things in perspective from a business standpoint. Our customer base is not the same as it was 30 years ago or, to a large degree, even five years ago. It's dangerous for any company to think that based on past success that its future is guaranteed. The bankruptcies of Chrysler and GM prove that. *PWI* has remained lean and strong through the ups and downs of pro wrestling and the economy, but we will never take our customers for granted. Our mission has always been to inform and entertain, and while we are always busy producing magazines, we have always taken the time to listen to what you have to say about the way we cover this great sport.

And as long as we can give you what you want, I think we will be around for a long time to come.

**Stu Saks**  
Publisher

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Founder  
(1919-2002)

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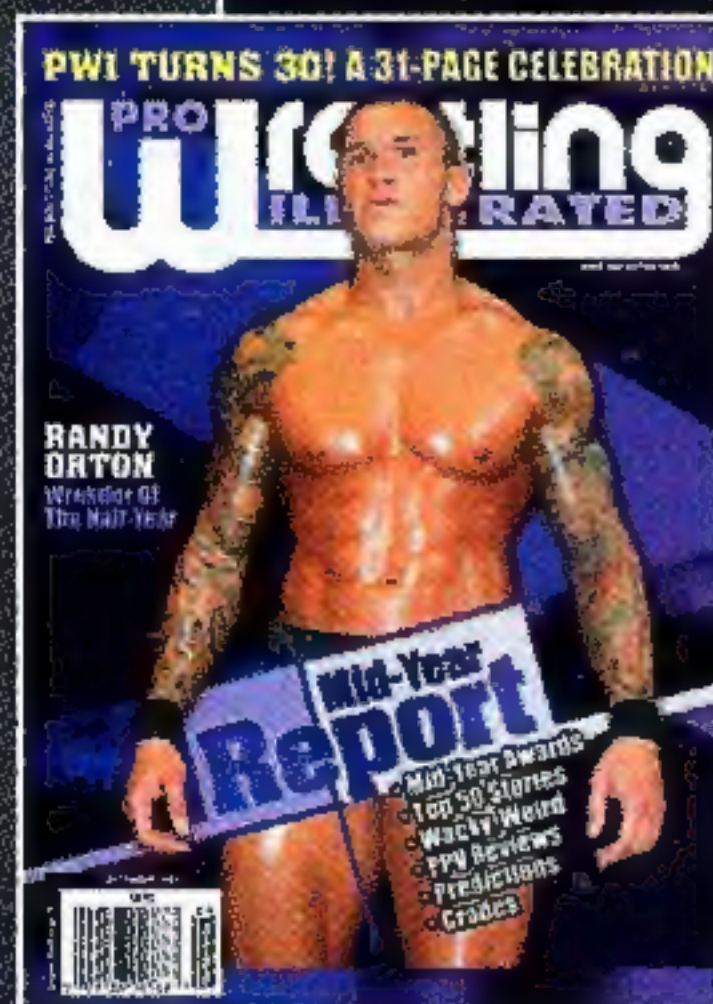
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Matt Roberts

COVER DESIGN:  
David Romanosky

LOOK FOR THE OCTOBER 2009 ISSUE OF  
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THE "PWI 500." ON SALE AUGUST 18, 2009



# before the bell

Compiled by Gerry Strauss

## ***WWE Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide To World Wrestling Entertainment***

What do you do when you've conquered the wrestling world? Indeed, while TNA plays for a distant second place, WWE continues to easily reign as ruler of pro wrestling. In fact, besides a brief period of Ted Turner-funded WCW dominance in the late-'90s, most fans of any age probably can't remember a time when WWE wasn't the big thing in the business.

So how should such an iconic entertainment company celebrate its longtime status? Tribute shows? Been there. Indulgent DVD compilations? Done that. Is there any way in the world WWE can make itself seem even more important than it already is?

How about an encyclopedia? Okay, let's get something straight right from the get-go. While impressive, the *WWE Encyclopedia* (DK/Brady GAMES, \$40), written by longtime WWE aficionados Bryan Shields and Kevin Sullivan, is just one volume. However, checking in at a robust 363 pages, there is no shortage of unbelievably deep content. We guarantee that you will be amazed at just how much info is crammed into this book.

Starting with former WWE tag team 3-Minute Warning (now better known as Umaga and former "Super Hero In Training" Rosie), the *WWE Encyclopedia* begins the task of listing every colorful character that has graced a McMahon-owned ring in the company's history. For the most part, the book does a great job of getting everyone in. From Scott Casey to Scott Steiner, it includes just about everyone. And, if wrestlers had multiple names or gimmicks during their time in the company, they all get their own separate listing.

However, there were some curious gaffes in the first edition. For example, not everyone who's held W/WWF/E

championships is listed. Tony Marino, who once held the old WWWF tag team championship, is nowhere to be found in this exhaustive piece of work. Another glaring flaw: Victor Rivera is listed in the book, but the wrestler

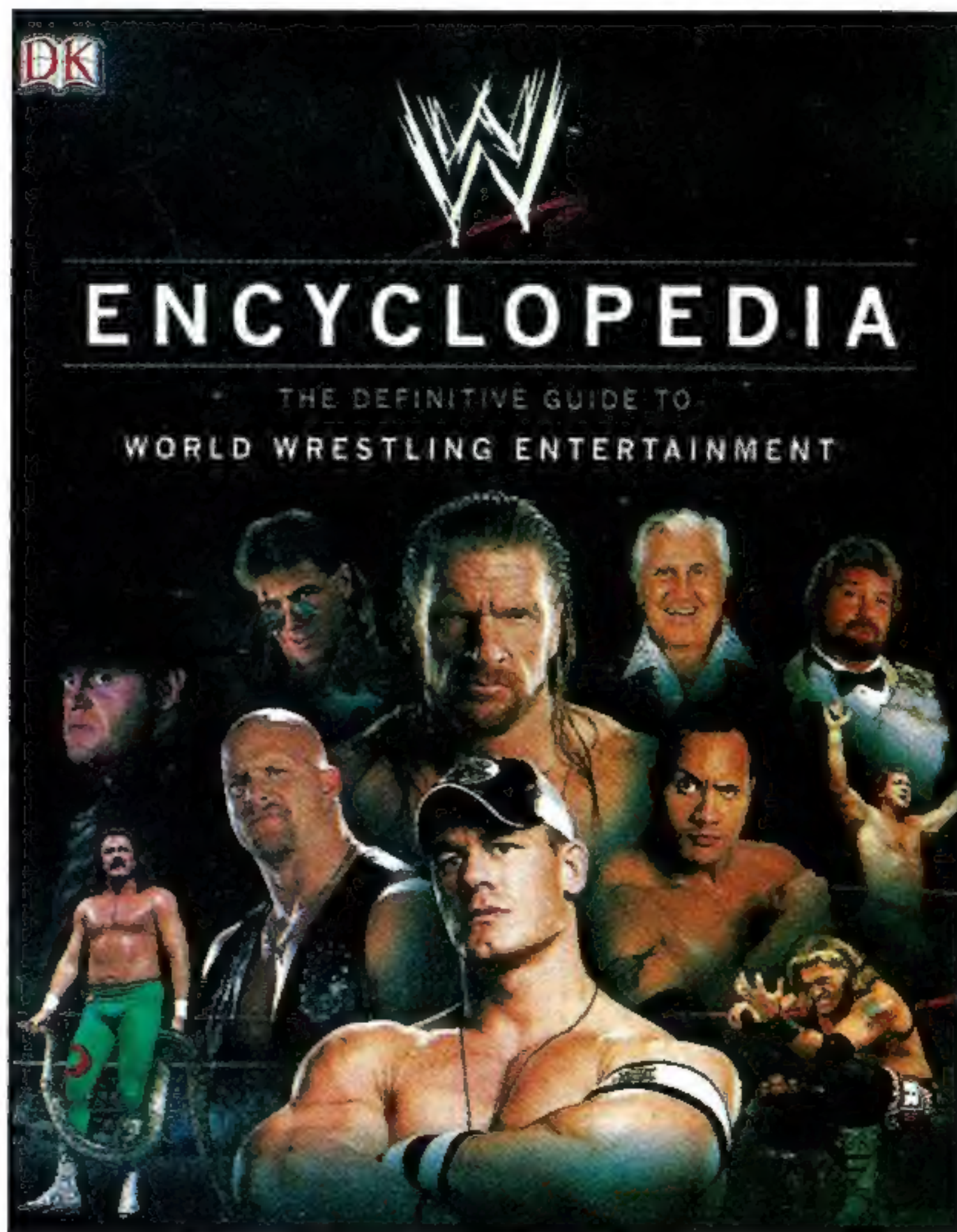
pictured in his slot certainly isn't him. Perhaps most notably, Hulk Hogan and Bruno Sammartino, two of WWWF's all-time greatest superstars, are not included in the montage of wrestlers shown on the dust cover.

For the people who are there, colorful photos, height, weight, hometown, signature moves, title history, and a notation for which decade(s) they were active are included. A short synopsis of each competitor's career is also included, offering just enough information to please fans of all ages and levels of geekdom without feeling like a textbook.

In addition, a variety of other listings are interspersed throughout. Match types, major events, title genealogies, and even listings about WWE merchandise give the book a comprehensive depth that makes it a one-stop shop for learning about WWE's past, present, and foreseeable future.

We give *WWE Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide To World Wrestling Entertainment* five out of five suplexes.

—Gerry Strauss





## Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related items you've been talking about lately and our gut reactions to each:

1. **Ken Kennedy returns to WWE action from the injured list, gets hurt, and is released.** So much for those world title aspirations.

2. **TNA shortens Christopher Daniels' name to Daniels.** First the Mighty Ducks, now Daniels? Where does it end?

3. **Batista, Rob Van Dam, and the former "Big Daddy V" have all filmed roles for an upcoming movie entitled *Wrong Side Of Town*.**

Take three accomplished wrestlers with hardly any acting experience, throw in an off-the-wall plot, and it still probably won't do as poorly as *12 Rounds*.

4. **Kayfabe Commentaries and Legends of The Ring will hold a roast for the legendary Terry Funk in Monroe, New Jersey, this October.** Something tells us that you might not want to bring your children to this one, folks.

5. **WWE makes headlines after Vince McMahon and Denver Nug-**



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

gets owner Stan Kroenke wage a public war over Denver's Pepsi Center, which was erroneously booked for both Raw and an NBA playoff game on the same night. Basketball? Does anyone still watch that fake garbage?

6. **TNA announces that Detroit Tiger Curtis Granderson will appear at its Slammiversary 7 event.** Wonder if Kroenke would draw a better buy rate.

7. **Ric Flair confirms that he intends to return to the ring outside of the United States.** Any bets on how long it will be before we see him lacing them up again on WWE TV?

8. **Victoria arrives in TNA.** Will this shamefully underused Diva—we mean Knockout—finally have a chance to show the world what she is capable of?

9. **TNA gives the producers of the upcoming documentary *Bloodstained Memoirs* footage from its video archive.** Wait, a wrestling promotion jumping on board with a movie before it is recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences? This can't be right.

10. **Tyson Kidd, Natalya, and D.H. Smith finally join up to form The Hart Dynasty.** Sorry, something seems odd about a hot female filling the "Anvil" role.

## The Internet Insider

The following wrestling-related items were culled from various wrestling-related websites—or were they? See if you can pick out the items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't actually mean they are true) and the ones that we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of this column on page 9.

1. **Navigationplex.com, a new multimedia website, has entered into negotiations with World Wrestling Entertainment to offer downloadable superstar voices for GPS devices.** The first wave of offerings will include a variety of Divas, Rey Mysterio Jr. (which will be in Spanish), and WWE legend Ron Simmons ("You missed your turn. Damn!").

2. **Debra Marshall, ex-wife of "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin and one of the most popular Divas of the Attitude**



Photo by George Napolitano

Era, has begun an online petition to convince TNA to bring her aboard. Citing her former work with Jeff Jarrett, Marshall and her agent, Marvin Ward, have been hitting MySpace and a variety of Internet radio shows in an attempt to appeal to enough fans to force Dixie Carter's hand.

3. **Following his successful return to the ring at WrestleMania 25 and tremendous showing at Backlash, Rick Steamboat is quietly training for a full-time return to the ring.** Sources speculate he would like to face Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania 26, but has also set his sights on a possible tag team with his son, Ricky Steamboat Jr.

4. **ECW General Manager Tiffany was nominated as a candidate for PETA's World's Sexiest Vegetarian 2009.** Competition includes Alyssa Milano, Kristen Bell, and *Ring* magazine editor Nigel Collins.



## One To Watch: Adam Cole

For 10 years, Combat Zone Wrestling has catered to the ultraviolent desires of bloodthirsty fans of hardcore wrestling. Glass, light tubes, fire ... it's all par for the course in the Combat Zone, known for producing some of the toughest, most barbaric warriors in pro wrestling.

So where in the world did Adam Cole come from?

At just 190 pounds and not even old enough to vote, this young cruiserweight sensation has quickly made his mark on the East Coast and beyond. Hailing from Panama City, Florida, Cole began the pursuit of his dream several years ago, relocating to Philadelphia and the Combat Zone Wrestling Academy. Under the watchful eyes of trainers John Dahmer and D.J. Hyde, Cole was given the freedom to develop his own gutsy, high-flying style.

Cole made his CZW in-ring debut against fellow rookie Drew Gulak in 2008, and has climbed his way from pre-show student matches to the main cards. He has branched out to Maryland Championship Wrestling and World Xtreme Wrestling, among others, and has turned heads everywhere—despite being outsized in almost every match. In fact, his high-flying tactics and Panama Sunrise finisher have made him a fan favorite to even the most hardcore CZW fan, and his high-octane performances have earned him a spot in MCW's 2009 Shamrock Cup Tournament.

While his clean-cut persona and exciting style have drawn comparisons to better-known counterparts like Paul London and Evan Bourne, Cole

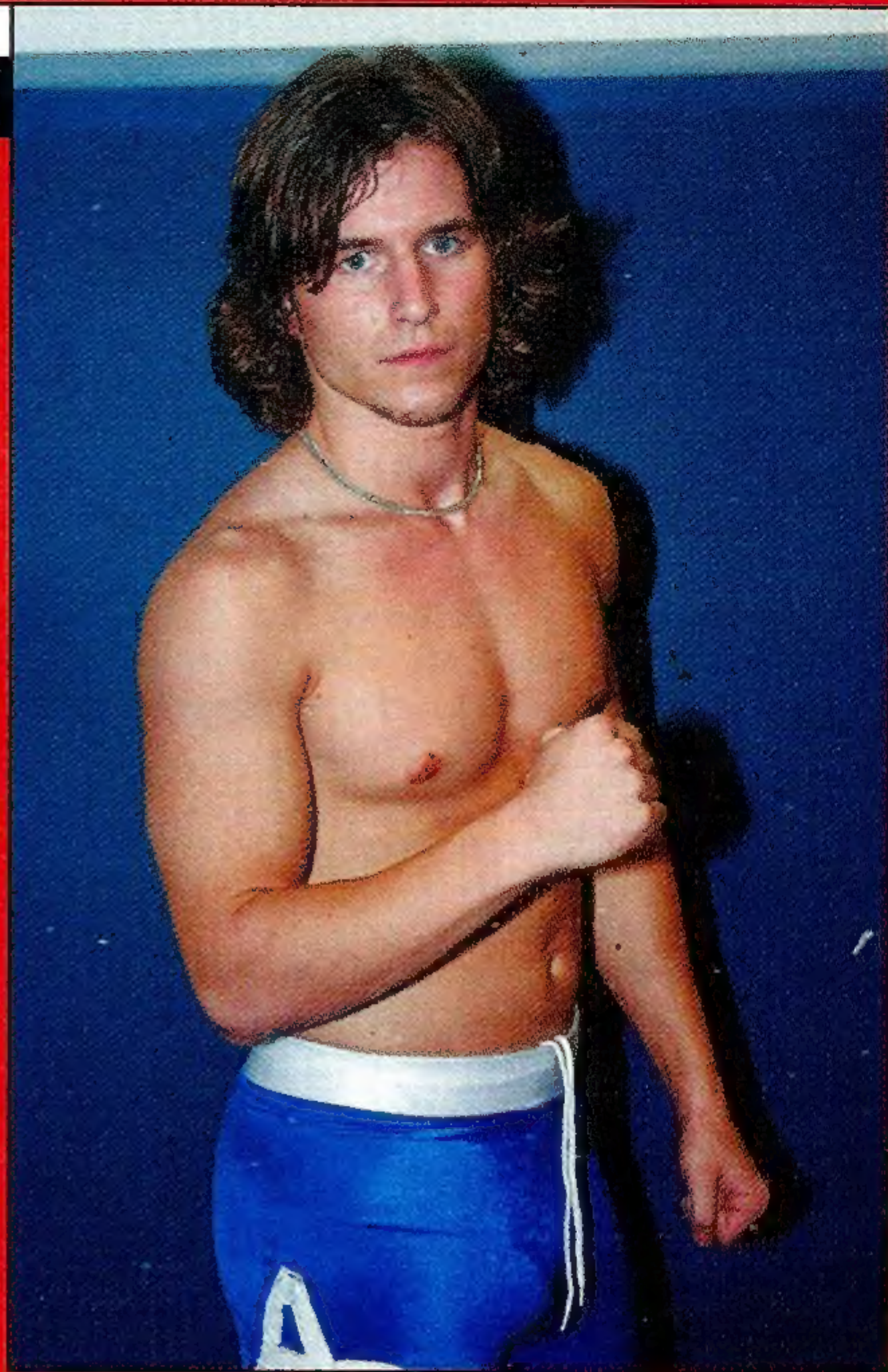


Photo by Lyle Williams

seems poised to carve his own niche in the sport he loves. Considering how far he has come in his very first year, however, odds are fans will soon be comparing the next high-flying newcomer to him.

## We Heard That!

"You get so brainwashed. You're on the road 300 days a year, and that's why guys get so messed up. This life just becomes a part of them. It's not real, but some guys who are still in the business think it is. You look at Mickey Rourke in *The Wrestler*—he just couldn't let it go. You live a double life. I was tired of trying to be who I was in the ring and then coming home for two days to be normal. They didn't allow you to be. The guys who get out are the smart ones, really and truly."

—UFC heavyweight champion (and former WWE champion) Brock Lesnar in an interview with *Maxim*

"There aren't many people like me. I am my own hero."

—Mark Henry in *The Philippine Star*

"I haven't seen Hulk in several years, and even though I said Hulk Hogan sucks when I came back to the WWE, Hulk Hogan was the man. I worked with him, and it was magic. No one understands that this

is magic. He is a good guy and I feel bad for what he is going through right now. I can't say enough about Hulk."

—Sean "X-Pac" Waltman, revealing his admiration for Hulk Hogan on the *Monday Night Mayhem* radio show

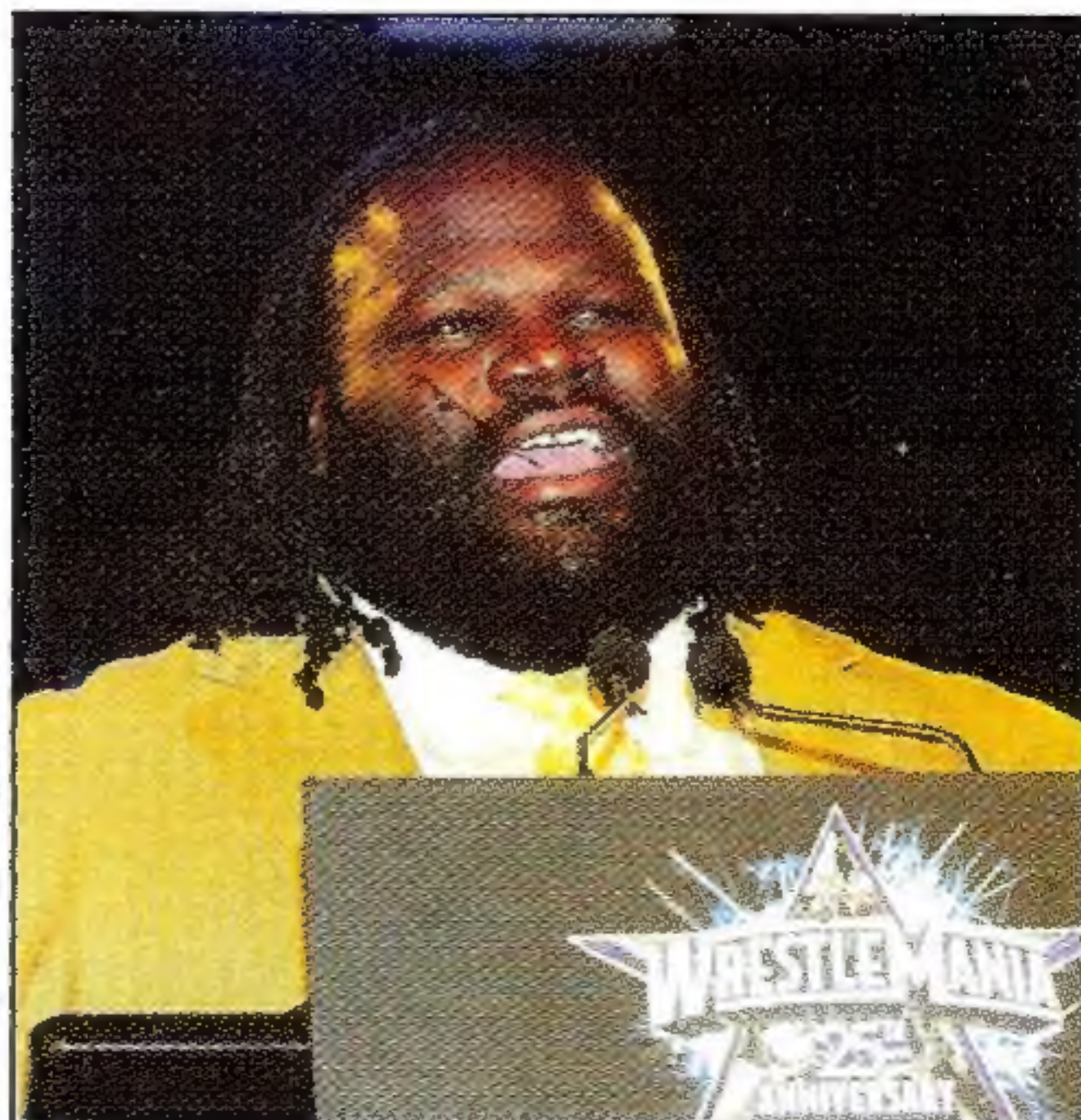


Photo by George Napolitano



"Kennedy is a studious guy and likely won't find it difficult to secure work. Sometimes a fresh start is good for a wrestler and I hope that's the case for Kennedy or whatever his next wrestling name will be."

—Jim Ross, speculating on Ken Kennedy's post-WWE future in his blog

"It's hard to stay away from something you like so well, especially when you still feel like you can do it."

—Ric Flair to the Associated Press, explaining why his return to the ring may be inevitable

"I'd love to join them so much I'd work for free!"

—Buff Bagwell, discussing his feelings about a potential WWE return in the New York Daily News

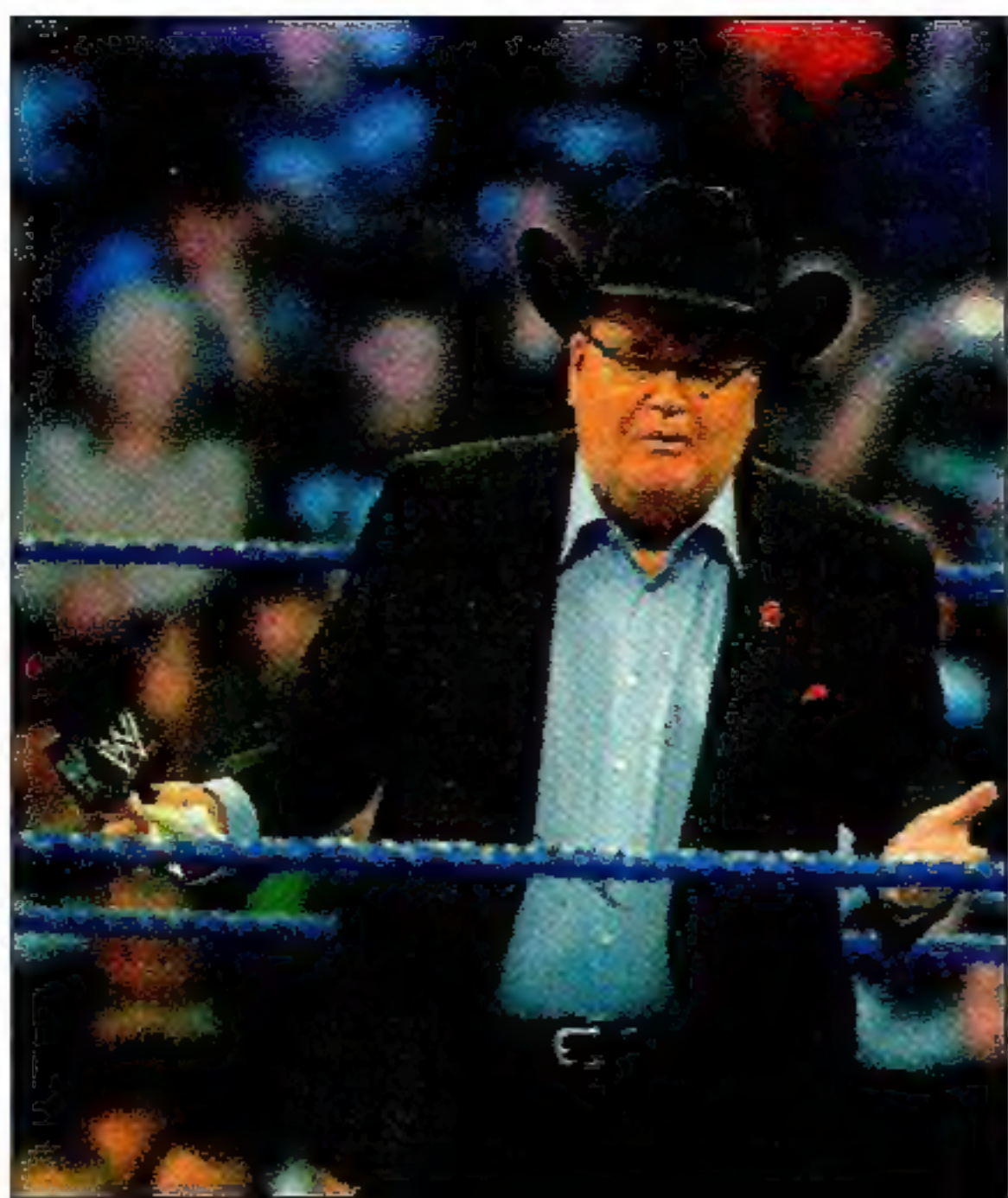


Photo by George Napolitano

## caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors of PWI? Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This shot of The Iron Sheik overpowering Gene LeBell, about 35 years past their primes, deserves a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you are up to the challenge, e-mail your zany quips to [prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com](mailto:prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com), or slap a stamp on an envelop and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!," Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better!



Photo by Mike Lano

## June's Best

Photo was taken after Bill Goldberg's demand, "Who's Next?!"

—Christopher Baker, [nursebaker64@live.com](mailto:nursebaker64@live.com)

"Now, all together, everyone point at the guy who will be asking, 'Would you like fries with that?' by the year 2001."

—M. Layton, [theoriginalvladromeo@yahoo.com](mailto:theoriginalvladromeo@yahoo.com)

So the beginning of the end of WCW was whose fault?

—Leo Connors, [bostbru@yahoo.com](mailto:bostbru@yahoo.com)

"One of these things is not like the other."

—Eric Shaffer, Sharon Hill, PA

The postcard Mr. McMahon got in 1989, he sent it back in 2001 saying, "I just bought your ass!"

—Denise Carter, [denisecarter@xplornet.com](mailto:denisecarter@xplornet.com)



Photo by Mike Lano

## Answers to Internet Insider:

Numbers 2 and 4 are true!



# ringside

With Bill Meltzer

**D**ON'T LOOK FOR WWE to return to Denver's Pepsi Center anytime soon. In a story that generated national me-

dia attention, **Vince McMahon** got into a very public spat with Denver Nuggets owner **E. Stan Kroenke** and arena officials. The dispute



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E. Stan Kroenke was no match for Mr. McMahon inside a Raw ring. In real life, though, the Denver Nuggets owner is a much more formidable foe.

centered around the scheduling of *Raw* conflicting with preparations for the NBA playoffs.

McMahon balked in a joint press release that, in his view, made it appear as though WWE was backing down to the Nuggets management and the might of the NBA. At the 11th hour, McMahon pulled the event out of Denver altogether and relocated it to Los Angeles' Staples Center, despite the impossibility of filling the large venue on such short notice.

The warring sides then traded barbed-tongued press releases, accusing the other of unprofessional behavior. McMahon gave a press conference in New York, saying that Kroenke and the Pepsi Center officials practiced "the most inept business management we've ever dealt with." He also acknowledged that WWE took a financial hit changing venues so late in the process, but said it was a matter of principle to him.

Never one to miss an opportunity to take on-air potshots at an old or new enemy, McMahon had the losing team of Raw's 10-man tag team main event wrestle the match decked out in Nuggets jerseys. The winners, not surprisingly, wore Lakers (their semifinal playoff opponents) apparel.

**Jeff Hardy** has reportedly reached an agreement with WWE and signed a new multi-year contract. In mentioning the deal on his ever-outspoken MySpace blog, brother **Matt Hardy** went on to express apparent disappointment that his own contract hadn't been taken care of.

The elder Hardy wrote that he'd been "giving every fiber of [his] being" to WWE, but "nothing really ever changes" in terms of his perpetual mid-card status. Shortly thereafter the blog was edited to say, "Things aren't always what they seem in life. And before anyone criticizes me ... everything I addressed is valid."

**Dr. Phil Astin**, the personal physician of the late **Chris Benoit**,





The jury's still out on whether or not Ric Flair will return to a WWE ring. But one thing is certain, he won't be appearing on HDNet for ROH.

has pleaded guilty to a 175-count indictment of illegally distributing enormous quantities of prescription drugs to numerous patients, including Benoit, spanning a period of May 2002 until Astin's arrest in July 2007. Just before press time, Astin was sentenced to 10 years in jail.

**Bobby Lashley** is generally a soft-spoken and easygoing type, but he was enraged by the pre-match antics of **Mike Cook** in their MMA bout. In an attempt to impugn Lashley's legitimacy as a fighter and mock his wrestling background, Cook came out to the

cage wearing a lucha libre mask. Infuriated by the show of disrespect, Lashley refused to touch gloves with Cook before the bout. Twenty-four brutal seconds later, referee **John McCarthy** had to step in to stop the fight. Lashley, who weighed in for the Cook match at 249 pounds, now sports a 3-0 record in his MMA venture.

It looks as though **Ric Flair** may be making a full-scale return to WWE. In addition to appearing at WrestleMania and the Judgment Day pay-per-view event at the Allstate Arena in Rosemont, Illinois, Flair has been making regular ap-

pearances on *Raw*. On several occasions, the "Nature Boy" has interfered on behalf of **Batista** and **John Cena** in their feud with **Randy Orton** and his **Legacy** cohorts, as well as **The Big Show**.

Flair has already expressed interest in a return to the ring but has said it would have to be okay with **Shawn Michaels** first. Michaels, of course, was handpicked for the honor of being Flair's final opponent. It would also depend on WWE's level of interest in having Flair make more than a one-shot appearance as an active wrestler. Flair, who had been appearing on ROH's HDNet shows, will finish his dates for Ring of Honor but cannot be shown on TV, as per WWE stipulations, despite comments he recently made to the Associated Press stating that WWE officials didn't mind the arrangement because they don't see ROH as competition.

Midway Games, the video game company behind *TNA Impact:*

*The Video Game* title as well as the iconic *Pacman*, *Mortal Kombat*, and *NBA Jam* franchises is currently in the process of liquidating most of its assets. The company, which filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy on February 11, issued a press release confirming that the TNA Wrestling license is among the assets being sold off.

Could Legacy be breaking up soon? Recently, **Ted DiBiase Jr.** has become increasingly critical of Orton in promos, with **Cody Rhodes** siding with the **Legacy** leader. Reportedly, WWE's long-term plan for DiBiase is to promote



him as a headlining fan favorite, and the storyline seeds seem to be getting planted sooner rather than later. DiBiase appears in the WWE Films sequel to *The Marine* and the McMahons apparently feel it would be better to promote the film with DiBiase firmly entrenched in a heroic role, rather than as a henchman for Orton.

While we're on the topic of acting, **Bret Hart** has expressed interest in taking on more acting engagements. The seven-time former world champion and two-time WWE Triple Crown winner is reportedly in talks to play a prominent role in a thriller entitled *Vengeance Wears A Skirt*. **Bianca Barnett** has already been cast as the female lead.

WWE has been heavily pushing **Maryse**, sometimes to the point of ridiculousness. A recent story on WWE's website noted that she's the "longest reigning WWE Divas champion in history." Of course, the title has only been around for a year, and, to date, **Michelle McCool** has been the only other titleholder. In other words, Maryse's championship legacy isn't in **Fabulous Moolah** territory quite yet. Maryse, who is 26 years old, would have to reign for another 27-plus years to match the mark the federation recognizes for the late Moolah (WWE doesn't acknowledge any of the brief occasions Moolah dropped the Women's championship prior to 1984).

Two other WWE Hall of Famers and former world champions have made recent appearances for WWE and competing TNA. Former NWA World champion **Terry Funk** made a surprise appearance at a TNA house show in his hometown of Amarillo, Texas. Funk was the special guest enforcer for the show's main event featuring **Samoa Joe** against **Scott Steiner**. He came out alongside old friend **Mick Foley**. Afterward, TNA published photos of Funk posing with Foley, Steiner, and Joe. Meanwhile, **The Iron Sheik**, a former WWF World champion, made the

Maryse is the longest reigning WWE Divas champion in the history of the sport. Maybe her reign would be more impressive if she wasn't just the second Divas champ.

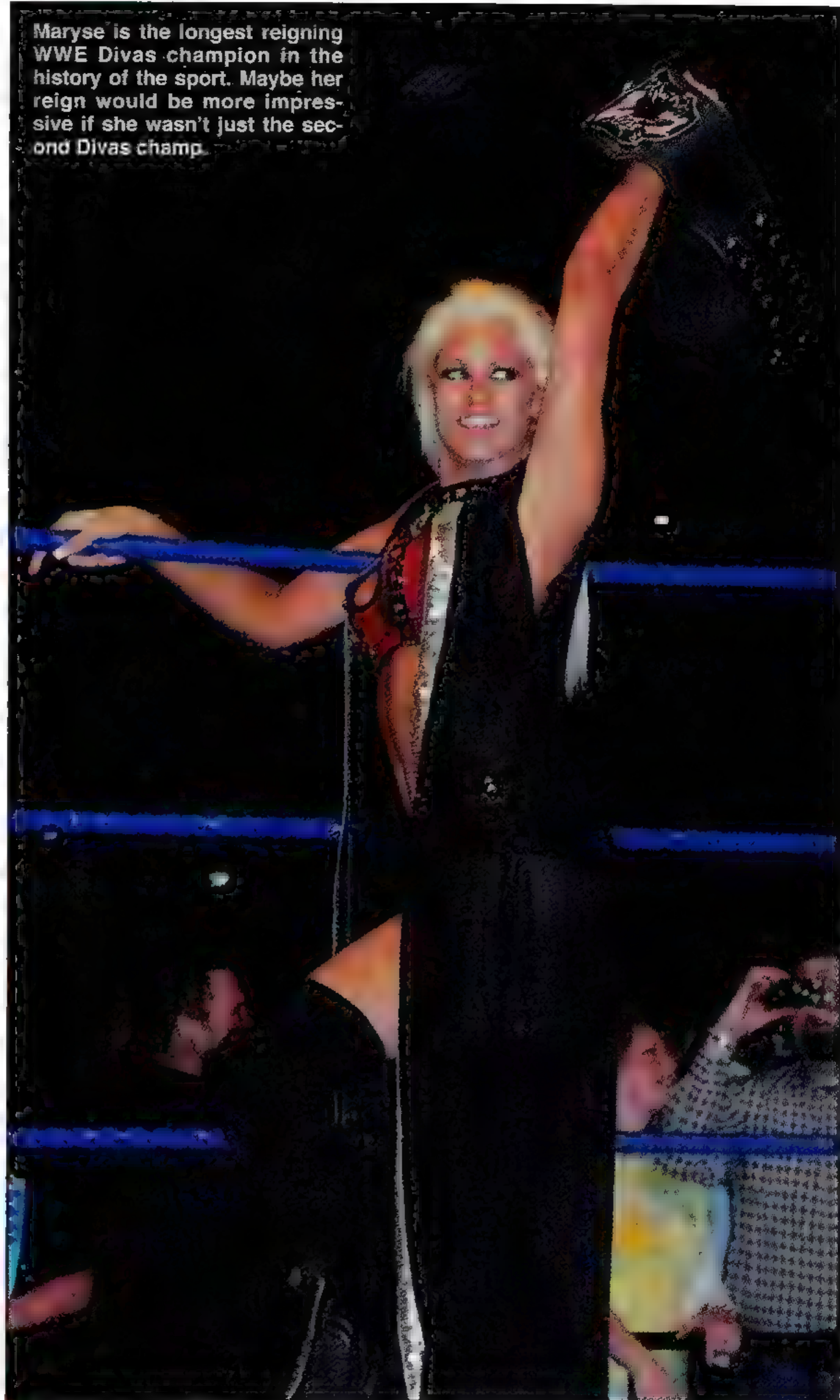


Photo by Steve Beyer

rounds backstage at WWE's Raw event in Los Angeles. Sheik was in L.A. doing a stand-up comedy routine at the legendary Comedy Store on Sunset Blvd.

The talented but injury-prone **Ken Kennedy** is hurt again. After being out of action for several months with a shoulder injury, Kennedy made his in-ring return only to get injured again. This

time, he jammed his wrist while taking an RKO from **Randy Orton** and was in considerable pain. Shortly after this, Kennedy was released by WWE.

There is still no timetable for the return of TNA's **Christy Hemme**, who has been sidelined since last November with a serious neck injury. She opted against surgery to fuse two bones together, choosing





John Tolos had a classic series of violent matches with Freddie Blassie during the early-'70s at Los Angeles' Olympic Auditorium. "The Golden Greek" recently succumbed to a series of heart attacks and strokes.

instead to try to let the injury heal naturally. She reports progress with her recovery, however, and believes the worst is behind her.

Another injured women's wrestler who has done a *Playboy* cover, **Candice Michelle**, recently took time out of her rehab to attend a Raw event and hang out backstage with her fellow WWE wrestlers.

**Natalya** wrote a heartfelt and eloquent blog in recognition of the 10-year anniversary of the tragic accident that took the life of her uncle, **Owen Hart**. Natalya, whose father, **Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart**, married into the Hart family, wrote that she "has never met a person who knew Owen and wasn't touched by him." To read the complete post, go to <http://fans.wwe.com/natalya/blog/2009/05/23/owen>.

**Dwayne Johnson** recently attended the annual White House Correspondents' dinner in the nation's capital. The former Rock later told the media that receiving the invitation rendered him speechless for once in his life. He attended the event with his ex-wife, with whom he remains on friendly terms.

Wrestling lost another legend on May 29, when "The Golden Greek" **John Tolos** passed away after a series of heart attacks and strokes.

Throughout his career, which spanned nearly 40 years, Tolos was best remembered for his bloody matches against **Fred Blassie**, with whom he feuded in Las Angeles, as well as his tag team exploits with his brother **Chris Tolos**.

Known as the **Canadian Wrecking Crew**, John and Chris won a

spate of regional NWA tag team titles and captured the WWF U.S. tag team title from **Gorilla Monsoon** and **Killer Kowalski** in 1963. Feared and vilified by fans across the country for their sadistic, rule-breaking tactics, the crowd in Teaneck, New Jersey, cheered the Tolos Brothers throughout the match that night.

As a solo wrestler, John held a number of singles NWA titles, including the Americas heavyweight championship.

Tolos made a brief return to the WWF in the early-'90s, serving as a "coach" to **The Beverly Brothers** and **Curt Hennig**, but receded from wrestling for good in 1992. Tolos was 78.

The wrestling community is also mourning the death of **Princess Jasmine** after a lengthy battle with pancreatic cancer. Shortly before her passing, she had been scheduled to receive an award

at the annual Cauliflower Alley Club reunion, but was unable to attend due to her dire medical condition.

Born **Cynthia Johnson**, Jasmine was originally trained by **Dick the Bruiser** and **Prince Pulinis** and made her debut in 1968 just three months after her training commenced. Over the course of her lengthy career, she wrestled in the AWA, WWF, a host of NWA territories, and countless independent promotions.

Arguably more popular outside the U.S. and Canada, she was booked for shows in such far-flung locales as South Korea, and various countries in Africa and the Caribbean, as well as more traditional wrestling countries such as Japan and Australia.

Our sincere condolences go out to the families and friends of both. □



# quick count

By Al Castle

**T**HE TRIPLE CROWN may not have been on the line at Belmont Park this year, but it's nevertheless exciting each summer to watch racehorses and their jockeys give it all they've got to get to the finish line.

In some ways, it's the complete opposite of the wrestling world, where the summer months seem to be the closest thing to an off-season the sport gets. With five months separating WrestleMania and SummerSlam, pro wrestling can seem a bit uninspired during the dog days of summer.

And so maybe this racing-inspired column can light a fire under some fans, wrestlers, and promoters alike.

**A Day at the Races.** It may have seemed like not much more than a segment filler, but a recent Divas tag team match on *Smackdown* had some pretty historic ramifications.

The match pitted Alicia Fox and Michelle McCool against Gail Kim and Melina. It may have been the first time that a four-person tag team match showcased four different races and ethnicities—African American, Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic.

Even more significantly, it wasn't treated as much of a big deal. That's actually a good thing. After years of fitting non-white wrestlers with ethnic stereotype gimmicks, WWE has made great strides over the years in creating a truly diverse WWE in which WWE brass and fans alike look past skin color to see the talent beneath—or the lack thereof.

**The Starting Gate.** Ten months after being fired from his longtime job as Ring of Honor's booker, Gabe

Sapolsky is channeling his passion for pro wrestling into a new venture—Dragon Gate USA.

ROH loyalists have gotten a taste of the high-energy, flashy wrestling style of the Japanese Dragon Gate organization over the years. But, while quality professional wrestling may be universal, Sapolsky may have a steep hill to climb in terms of creating interest in his DGUSA beyond a tiny niche of American fans.

There are several cultural differences separating American and Japanese wrestling that might turn off some fans, not the least of which is the obvious language barrier. With many of DGUSA's competitors having limited, if any, knowledge of the English language, it could be tough for Sapolsky to establish characters and storylines that will appeal to new fans.

But if anyone knows something about taking an offbeat wrestling company and making it work, it's Sapolsky.

**The "Filly" Favorite.** New York boasts "The World's Greatest Arena" in the form of Madison Square Garden, but in recent months, it's been another big city that has served as the epicenter of the wrestling world—Philadelphia.

ROH has hosted its HDNet television tapings in Philly. Dragon Gate USA is also set to hold its first event in the city.

TNA's Lockdown pay-per-view emanated from the Liacouras Center in Philadelphia. And WWE's Night of Champions event is scheduled to take place at the Wachovia Center. Even the Ultimate Fighting Championship is scheduled to come to Philadelphia in August.

As much as Philly fans might enjoy having such a wealth of big time wrestling shows hosted in their city, the wrestlers who perform there are probably even happier.

It's no secret that a hot crowd can make even a dull match entertaining, and a good match into a great one. Since even before the days of the rabid "ECW Arena" crowds, Philadelphia has been known not only for its Brotherly Love, but also for its love of wrestling. It's obvious that wrestling promoters know that as well.

**The Kentucky Derby.** Despite the challenges faced by Ohio Valley Wrestling since WWE pulled the plug on its working relationship with the promotion, the Louisville, Kentucky,



Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Following his departure from Ring of Honor, Gabe Sapolsky is back with a new promotion—Dragon Gate USA. Although Sapolsky helped build ROH, Contributing Writer Al Castle feels cultural barriers could interfere with Sapolsky's ability to do the same for the Japanese promotion.



based indy is still running strong, and recently celebrated its landmark 500th television episode.

Without the funding, star power, and rub that OVW got for several years as WWE's primary developmental territory, OVW has had to go it alone. The promotion that played a key role in the early careers of John Cena, Randy Orton, and Brock Lesnar is having a tougher time boasting that it is the place where tomorrow's superstars compete today.

But at least one WWE power broker still sees potential in OVW as a breeding ground for future stars. John Bradshaw Layfield saw enough potential in the company to come on board as a financial sponsor for the past several months. With up-and-comers like OVW champ Apoc helping steer the ship, JBL's latest business arrangement should work out better than the one he had with Shawn Michaels.

**The Stakes.** How does a world champion compete and lose a pay-per-view main event match in which

his title was on the line, and somehow remain world champion? TNA found a way.

The latest in TNA's never-ending stream of convoluted gimmick matches was the Four-Way Ultimate Sacrifice match, where each contestant put something near and dear to him on the line. TNA World champion Mick Foley put his title up for grabs in the match, which he did not win. But because he was not pinned, he held on to his title.

This was just the latest in many contrived stipulations that have served to diminish the value of world titles in wrestling. WWE was guilty of the same crime when it put Triple H's WWE World title on the line in a six-man tag team match at Backlash earlier this year. At least in that match, Orton won the title by pinning the champion. But at the following PPV, Judgment Day, Orton put that very same title up against Batista and lost. But because Orton was disqualified, he did not lose the title.

Generally speaking, wrestling main events should feature world

champions defending their titles in a standard match. Anything that strays from that should be a rare exception.

**The Trifecta.** I can't help but feel old lately watching ECW, where the Hart Dynasty has been wreaking havoc throughout WWE's third brand.

It feels like just yesterday that Bret Hart, Jim Neidhart, and "The British Bulldog" Davey Boy Smith were new, young faces in the former World Wrestling Federation. Fast-forward a quarter-century, and Hart's protégé Tyson Kidd, Smith's son David Hart Smith, and Neidhart's daughter, Natalya, are injecting a similar kind of youthful energy into the ECW product.

While Rick Steamboat Sr., Ric Flair, and Jerry Lawler may still have the craving to get back in the ring from time to time, the surviving members of the Hart clan should get equal fulfillment knowing that a new generation of ring technicians is keeping their names alive in the wrestling world. □

Tyson Kidd, Natalya, and David Hart Smith have the look and the pedigree, but can the Hart Dynasty be as dominant as their forebearers?



Photo by Robert Beukema



# in focus

By Dave Lenker

## ONE LONG FOOTNOTE

IT'S ONE OF the best lines I've heard in my 16-plus years with the *PWI* family of magazines. I know I've shared it before, but it bears repeating at this point. Tommy Dreamer has told several of our staffers at various points of his career, though not so often lately, that if he can't immediately recall your name when he sees you, it's "because I get hit in the head for a living."

Might make a nice little career epitaph for a man who obviously has a sense of humor.

And well, it appears he might not necessarily have to worry about absorbing any more crushing cranial shots.

By the time you read this, Dreamer could very well be retired, whatever that means in professional wrestling.

It's funny that it has been the better part of a decade since Dreamer has been consistently relevant in this sport. Or at least since he's been consistently anywhere near the spotlight, even though he has been under the employ of WWE since ECW folded in 2001. He has somehow managed to kind of fade away after *joining* the big company rather than after *leaving* it. What's supposed to be the apex of any wrestler's career became for lack of a better word, a footnote to a fantastic run he had in front of crowds that often numbered in the hundreds, or barely into four figures.

Anyway, it didn't make huge headlines a few months ago when Dreamer announced that he'd retire if he could not capture the ECW championship by the time his contract expired in June. Of course, that date conveniently just about coincided with

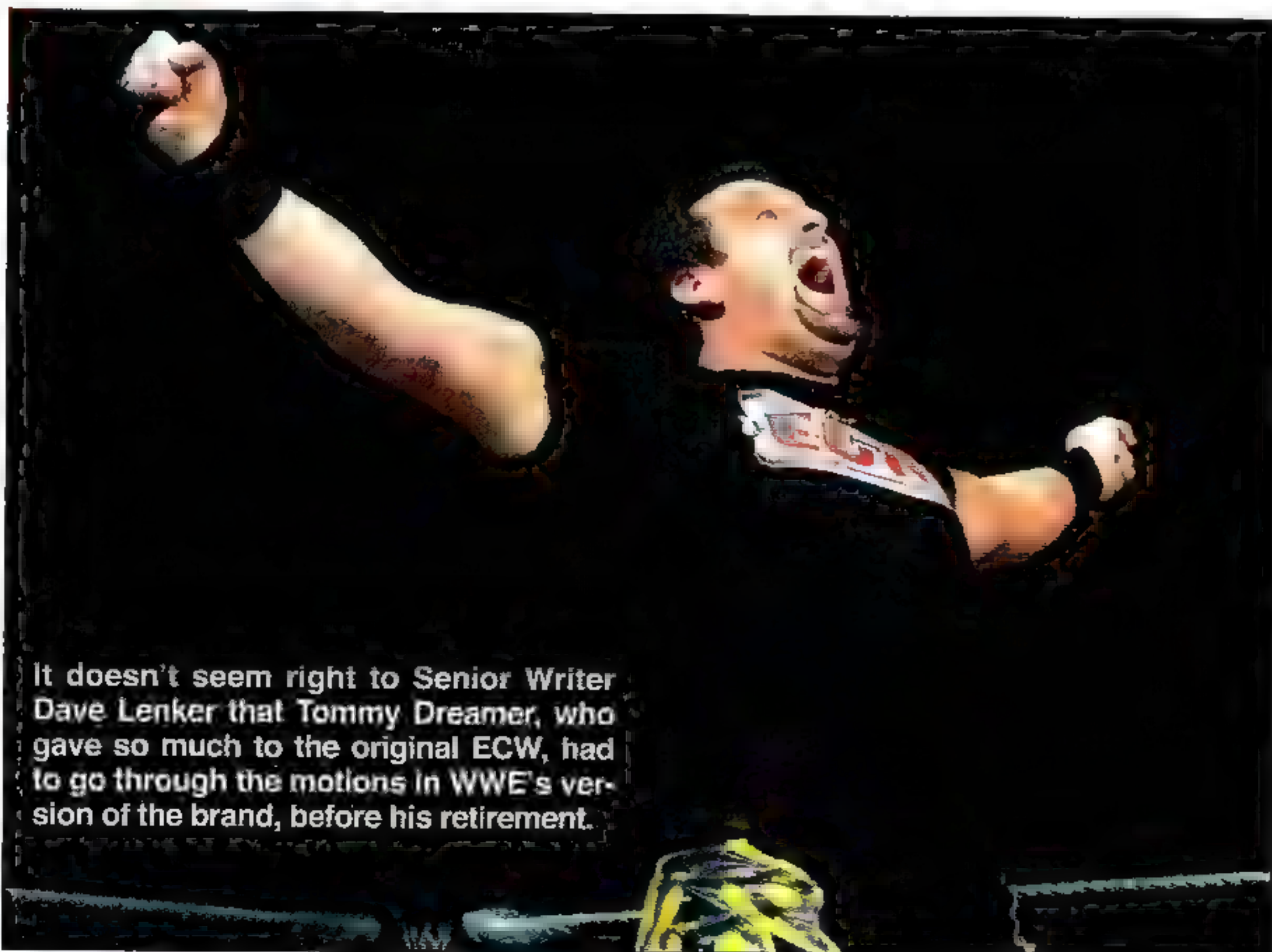
that of WWE's Extreme Rules pay-per-view (which had once been known as the ECW One Night Stand pay-per-event that provided the impetus for WWE's revival of ECW as a full-fledged brand three years ago).

It's almost sad that the man who was the heart and soul of the original ECW still has to pretend (though he'd probably never admit it) that the ECW championship still has any of the same meaning it had a decade-plus ago. But I suppose that takes us back to that famous quote from Dreamer that I mentioned earlier. The man was willing to do anything for the original ECW (read: take as many shots to the skull as need be), and he'll do his part for the ECW that exists today in name only.

Dreamer is the last remaining link to that old ECW, the one in which he finally captured a world championship more than nine years ago in the cozy and rickety old ECW Arena, gave a tearful victory speech, then promptly dropped the title to Justin Credible in an impromptu bout. That triumph for Dreamer—a token reward of sorts for a man so loyal and selfless—represented genuine emotion, so much so that one of the photographers at ringside that night actually was moved to weep.

It's a little surprising to me that Dreamer has lasted this long after the real ECW died. He was a bit of a player in WWE initially, as he joined the short-lived WCW/ECW Alliance against WWE in 2001, then had a little fun eating and drinking disgusting things to get himself noticed. He grabbed some momentum when WWE brought back ECW for a few of those One Night Stand pay-per-views that actually somehow did capture a lot of that old ECW spirit for three special hours at a time. But since ECW's old identity has faded, Dreamer's appearances have meant less and less. He's one of those guys branded as dangerous every time he wrestles on ECW TV but who hasn't gotten the results to back up that kind of hype.

Dreamer is still solid if unspectacular in the ring. The matches he has



It doesn't seem right to Senior Writer Dave Lenker that Tommy Dreamer, who gave so much to the original ECW, had to go through the motions in WWE's version of the brand, before his retirement.



had with Christian this year have been decent, but let's face it—without the blood and weapons and rabid ECW crowds of years past—Tommy Dreamer matches just aren't the same. So forgive me if all this talk of his retirement and/or winning the ECW title one more time doesn't excite me much. It just makes me appreciate what he did—endured, if you will—a decade ago for our enjoyment. And it doesn't matter to me if he can't remember my name. I'll remember his.

## AND SPEAKING OF RETIREMENTS ...

Ric Flair's uncontrollable urge to return to active competition was garnering so much attention this spring and into the early-summer that Lisa Marie Varon's decision to end her retirement almost before it could get started got a bit lost.

Clearly, WWE believed that the Diva previously known as Victoria was truly going to retire, as opposed to just leave the company, when she wrestled her last meaningless and very ordinary match against Michelle McCool buried on the middle of a *Smackdown* broadcast. It would not have been acknowledged as just her final bout in WWE if she was just on her way out of the company.



Lenker says Lisa Marie Varon, f.k.a. Victoria, has plenty to offer TNA in her post-WWE days. Hopefully, her tenure will be mutually beneficial.

But whereas I find Flair's apparent decision to unretire a bit troubling, I am excited and in full support of Varon's decision. She has never struck me as the spotlight-craving, egotistical type, she's still young-ish, and I look forward to seeing her in the TNA Knockouts division, in which her vastly underrated ring skills and personality should be showcased more prominently than they have been since the golden days of her feud with Trish Stratus.

At this juncture, I have no idea what was behind her decision to sign with TNA, whether she truly planned to walk away completely at the time of her departure from WWE, or even how long she intends to stick around TNA (check out Harry Burkett's extended "Q & A" with Varon in the upcoming Volume 29 of *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling* for her thoughts on many subjects). I do know for sure that WWE could have gotten a lot more out of her in the last few years of her tenure. I hate to say that someone "deserved" a better fate than, in this case, taking on the thankless role of helping along some of the younger Divas and making them look a lot better in their matches than a lot of them realistically are. It's just that along with Mickie James, Beth Phoenix, McCool, Natalya, and maybe a few others, she could have remained a more featured Diva and anchored the women's division.

I consider myself as much of an admirer of the fine female form as our esteemed editor-in-chief, but it's getting harder for me to keep track of the too many WWE Divas—a lot of whom seem to have no real defined role—without a proverbial scorecard.

Going out with barely a whimper (a loss to McCool) and without a chance to bid farewell on TV had to bother her on some level.

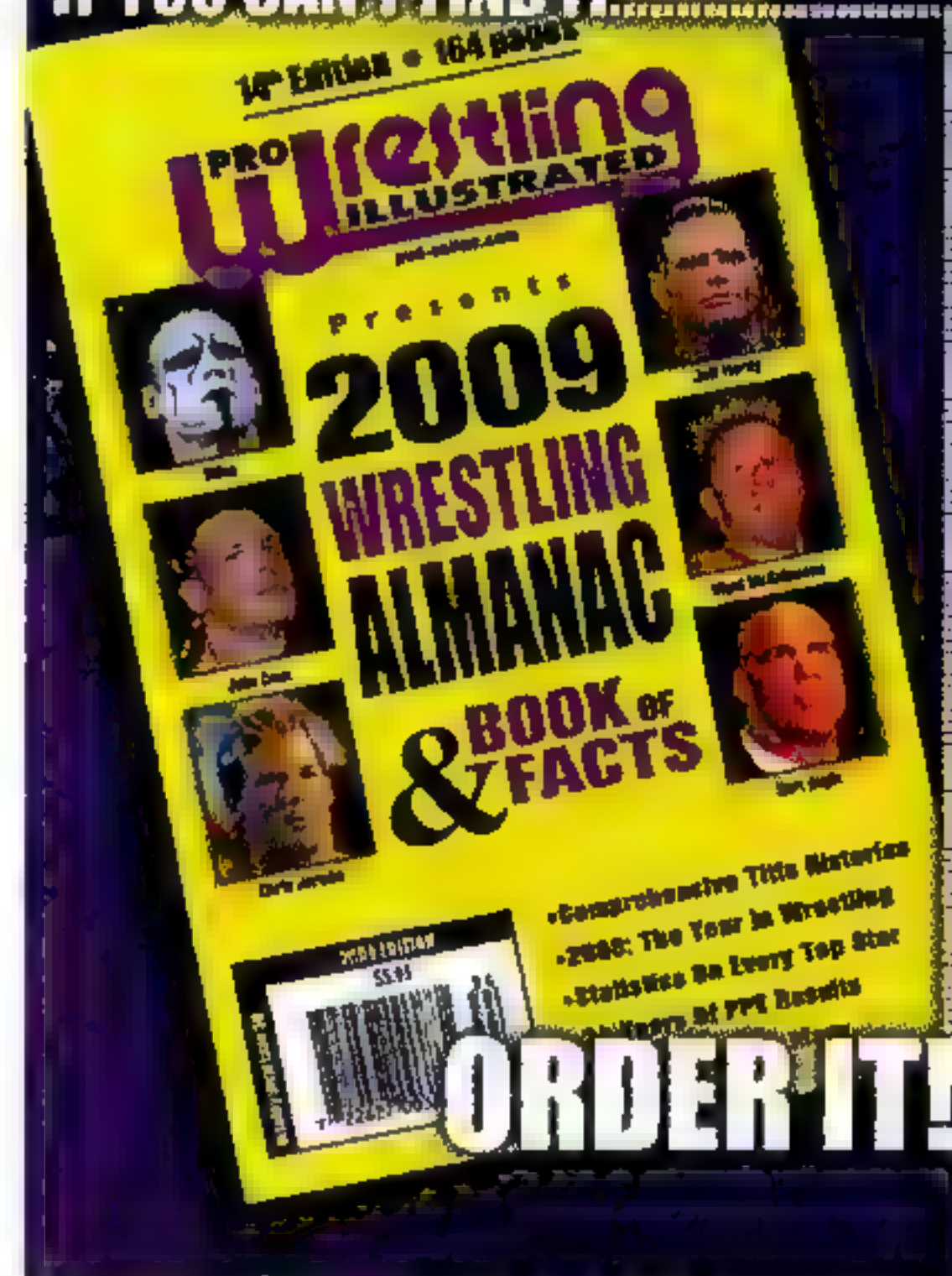
If part of her motivation is to show WWE what it was missing out on, good for her. If she's in it for the love of the game and a chance to continue making a very nice living, good for her, too. Comeback of the Year—or at least a top three finish—for Varon in 2009 sounds great to me. ☐

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# off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:  
**TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034**  
 Or send e-mail to: [offthetoprobe@yahoo.com](mailto:offthetoprobe@yahoo.com)

*(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)*

**M**Y COVER HAS been blown. I was recognized in my town by a fan as something of a Z-List celebrity. The incident ended up with me not knowing exactly how to get the mark to leave me alone. Unfortunately, I'm not sure where to hide now.

Since leaving PWI full-time, I've enjoyed total obscurity. It's not that most people knew who I was—or even cared once we were introduced. It's just been nice to enjoy a wrestling show without being bombarded with stupid questions from fans and, even worse, from wrestlers and promoters. Nowadays, the majority of my conversations aren't wrestling related. My time is spent on my vineyard and cutting heel promos on the old bats who dare enter my newspaper office to complain about something stupid like their subscriptions. Okay, so some things stay the same. I'm still a heel—even at the game of life.

Fear not, my minions. I am far from retiring from this crazy business. Once wrestling is in one's blood, it's difficult to walk away. I guess I'll always be your champion, whether I like it or not.

Dear Brandi,

Why is wrestling getting more stupid? I mean Jericho is getting the title "Legend Killer," same as Randy Orton got a few years back. As far as I can tell, Matt Hardy may be getting the Bob Orton "Use The Cast" story. Everyone can tell Cody and Ted want to turn on Randy. Have you seen the looks they (mainly Cody) give Randy?



Photo by George Napolitano

See, it doesn't take a genius to realize how pitiful Cena really is. If Cory Waddell can figure it out, you can, too!

TNA is still doing that MEM crap. It is really getting stupid.

Another question. How come people keep leaving? I mean Gail Kim left TNA. Christian left TNA. Tazz and Boogeyman left WWE. I want to get into the business, but not if this crap keeps up.

Last thing, I read an old magazine with a letter defending Cena. I mean I like him, but I have to agree with what you said. He is not as good as everybody makes him. I mean he can fight Kane. He gets choke-slammed three times, one time over the top rope, and then somehow comes back to win? Yeah right, Cena. I don't know, but all this crap needs to stop. Thanks.

CORY WADDELL  
[coryw619@gmail.com](mailto:coryw619@gmail.com)

Dear Cory,

Unfortunately, wrestling is made increasingly more stupid to accommodate the mental capacity of fans like you. Reharsing storylines isn't usually a problem since most of you have virtually no attention span. I'm surprised you even remember the stuff is recycled.

Another answer. People keep jumping from promotion to promotion because they can. It happens all the time. I will never understand how this shocks people.

Last answer. I'm always amazed when even a fan of your caliber can figure out that John Cena is useless. It reinforces my disdain for him.

Dear Brandi,

When TNA first began to air on national TV, I was pleased. Total Nonstop Action was the perfect name for the company. But recently TNA has begun to overlook the very thing that made it different from WWE: talented wrestlers who were still hungry and worked as if every match were a pay-per-view.



Now the company should be called "TMO: Too Many Old-timers." You can see that Vince Russo is simply rerunning old stories that weren't that great to begin with. You have the Main Event Mafia, which is nothing more than a third-rate Millionaires Club angle from WCW. It is a step up from what could be termed the *TNA Angle Show* that went on for way too long.

Given the preference these days for name recognition over talent, how long before guys like Samoa Joe, A.J. Styles, and the Latin American Xchange decide it is better to be a small fish in a large pond than just bait for guys who are long past their prime, and start leaving for WWE?

If you are going to be overlooked, then it becomes "Who pays the best?" and I doubt that TNA has anywhere near the pockets WWE has. It seems that loyalty to a company should have more pull than what some guy did 15 years ago. Remember, most of the MEM are the ones that helped kill WCW.

JAMES BEASLEY  
Wilmington, NC

Dear James,

The battle between veterans and newbies has been played out repeatedly over the years. It's not limited to just wrestling, either. There will always be some old fart that won't give up his top spot just because some young snot wants it. It's part of the cycle of life. Just ask any goat that has attained king-of-the-hill status. Now, old goats like the Main Event Mafia may seem like re-treads from WCW, but maybe it's because the younger kids just simply don't have the pizzazz to make casual fans take notice. Maybe it's because fans like you don't force the sponsors and TV stations to rethink brand recognition. Until fans force the subject, the newer guys may never get over with the corporate suits that most likely don't even realize their station carries wrestling. Start a grass roots campaign. Write letters, make calls, and

show your support. I would never condone spamming the hell out of the Spike TV e-mail addresses, but I do suggest a few dozen well-thought, well-written letters sent through the regular mail to prove your point. Maybe you can inspire the change wrestling needs. (I can't believe I wrote that without laughing!)

*Letter of the Month  
(taken verbatim from actual letters to share my torture with you all):*

Dear Jeff Hardy,

I am Melodie! I am your number 1 fan! I am 13 years old! I Love it when you do the Twist of Fate! I Love your entrance music so much it is my ringtone on my phone and my song for mySpace! You are a really good artist! I saw your alumnies they weve awesome! Im so glad that you are still wrestling after all the crap that has been happening 2 you! Hopefully it will all stop soon! I know one thing no matter what happens I will always be your biggest fan even after your gone from the WWE! When I get older I would like 2 be a wrestler!

Love your  
Biggest Fan  
Melodie

Dear Jeff Hardy,

I realize marks such as the one who authored this, *ahem*, lovely letter are the main crux of your fat royalty checks, but is it really worth it? I know that at this moment you're busy trying to decide whether or not you're going to renew your WWE contract. You need to seriously consider your options—especially

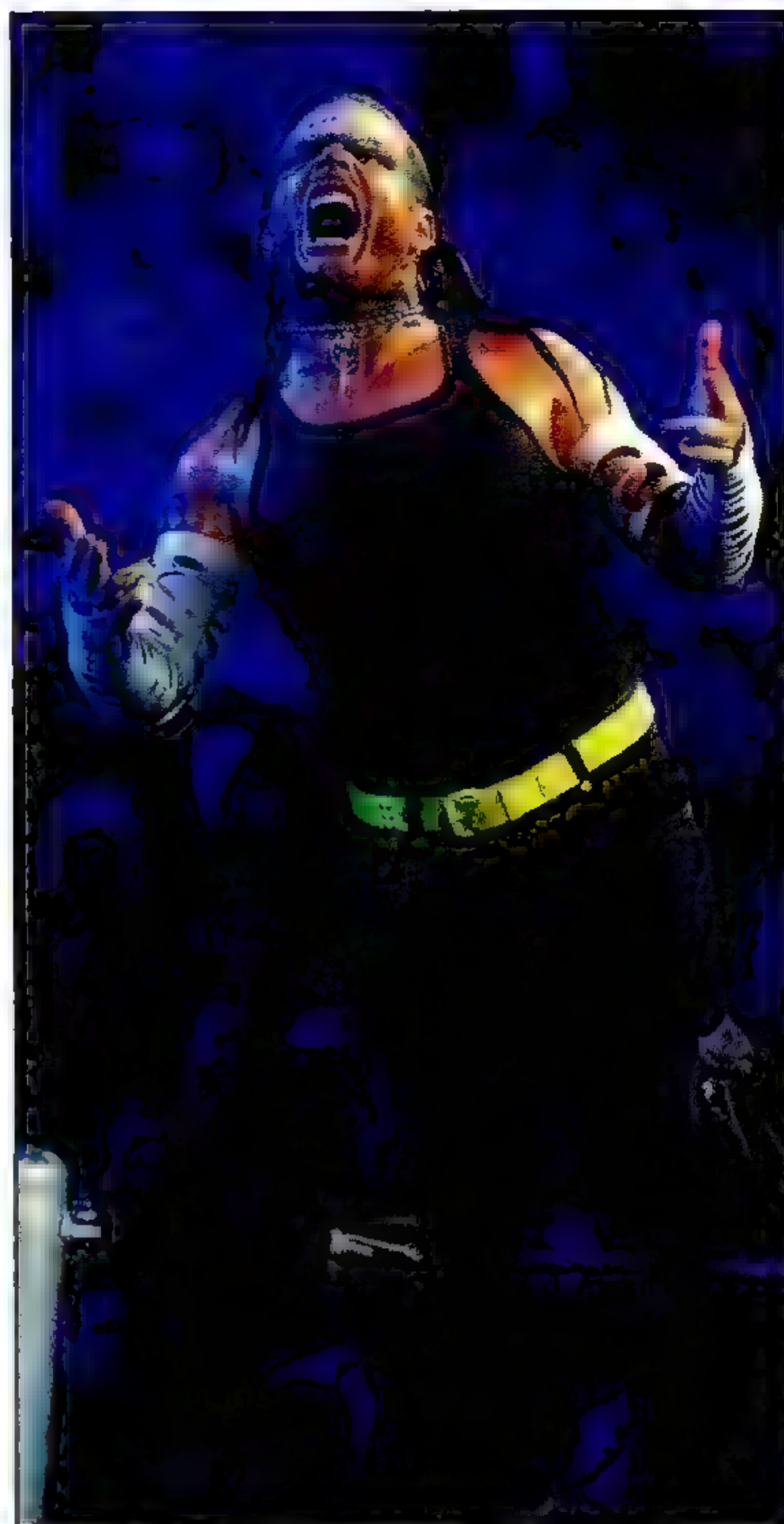


Photo by George Napolitano

Jeff, for your sake, my sake, and the sake of all teenage girls across the world—please do not renew your contract with WWE. As exciting as you may be, you are only hastening the decline of female intelligence.

ones that include hordes of fans such as Melodie.

Jeff, as a friend, I suggest not signing that contract. Walking away from WWE at this point would allow socially awkward, educationally stunted teenage girls all over the world to finally concentrate on their schoolwork long enough to draft a letter that makes sense and uses proper punctuation. Without you, teenagers like this one will have no desire to use exclamation points to end every sentence. Although their lives won't be quite as exciting, their teachers, families, and Ritalin dispensers will thank you for it. I will thank you for it as well. □



# press conference...



While many TNA fans focus on Love's battles with Awesome Kong, she can't afford to overlook challengers such as ODB. Love may think she's head and shoulders above her fellow Knockouts, but they'll be gunning for her title.

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

**A**NGELINA LOVE MAY not always inspire love among fans or her opponents but the ringleader of TNA's Beautiful People faction (a.k.a. Mi Pi Sexy) has shown an undeniable devotion to her profession. Overcoming a torn anterior cruciate knee ligament and a 2007 release from her WWE developmental contract, the 27-year-old Canadian has defied the odds to rise to the top of the TNA Knockouts division.

Ranked 16th in last year's "PWI Female 50," Love is a lock to climb in 2009's ratings. She stunned many observers by winning a three-way match against Taylor Wylde and the seemingly invincible Awesome Kong to capture the Knockouts championship at the Lockdown pay-per-view in Philadelphia. Ever since, Love and her compatriots—including Cute Kip—have engaged in a vicious feud with an infuriated Kong. Thus far, Kong has dominated but The Beautiful People refuse to go down quietly. Love has even successfully defended her title one-on-one, albeit with considerable outside help.

As opinionated—and often downright obnoxious—as she is physically attractive and skilled, Love's accomplishments sometimes get overshadowed by her outrageous actions in the ring and statements on the mike. Unphased by the booing she receives, Love attributes the enmity to the jealousy of people less attractive than herself, Velvet Sky, and Madison Rayne. She also asserts that she's not afraid of the much bigger Kong.

Love recently granted a contentious telephone interview to Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda and Contributing Writers Liz Hunter and Bill Meltzer. As usual, she minced no words in declaring the superiority of Mi Pi Sexy to the rest of TNA.



**Frank Krewda:** Thank you for finally agreeing to this interview, Angelina. To be perfectly honest, this was one of the trickiest "Press Conferences" we've ever arranged. You gave us a 15-minute window of time in one day out of an entire month. Glad we were able to pull this thing together.

**Angelina Love:** Clock's ticking, dude. You just wasted about 20 seconds. You heifers should consider yourselves lucky I'm even willing to speak to you. But I want to have my say. It was a joke that I was only ranked 16th by your magazine last year. I proved you geeks wrong. You all ought to thank me for it, though.

**Bill Meltzer:** Thank you for what?

**Love:** For giving all you ugly, out-of-shape slobs something to drool over and fantasize about. Would you rather look at me or would you rather look at Awesome Kong? Don't bother wasting your time responding. The answer is obvious. The point is that I've proved time and time again that I'm superior in every way possible to all the skanks and freaks in TNA, especially Elephant Kong.

**Meltzer:** With all due respect, don't you think it's a bit premature to dismiss Kong? She pretty much ...

**Love (interrupting):** Dude, I've heard you're a bit premature.

**Meltzer:** Very classy, Angelina. Anyway, I was starting to say that

Kong has pretty much dominated every match against you. You won the title in a match where you pinned Taylor Wylde, not Kong. And your one-on-one win against Kong was tainted to say the least.

**Love:** Listen, I don't make the matches, I just wrestle them—and win. There's no such thing as a tainted win in wrestling. I don't complain to the refs when Kong attacks Velvet, Madison, Kip, and me before and after the bell. So she's got no business complaining when I do what it takes to win.

**Liz Hunter:** Actually you do complain, pretty much non-stop. You complain to the refs and you complain in every promo you cut.

**Love:** Well, well, well. If it isn't Liz Hunter, the Golden Girl of pro wrestling journalism. Shouldn't you be chasing Rick Martel or Tommy Rich at whatever retirement community you're

**Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.**

“My toughness definitely gets underrated. No question about it. I'm every bit as tough as any man in this business, but it hardly gets mentioned. All anyone ever wants to talk about is how hot I am.”







Although Love has enjoyed some success over Taylor Wylde (above), the undersized spitfire has also gained an upper hand on her at times (below). Either way, fans and Love should expect Wylde to seek a rematch for the Knockouts championship.



living in nowadays? Maybe I should call you Blanche. For your information, Blanche, I'm the kind of woman who speaks her mind. If someone like Kong or Wylde is cheating, I call them on it. But I don't whine about it. Whining is for losers.

**Krewda:** Let's talk about your alliance with the other members of The Beautiful People. First of all, how and why did your faction connect with Kip James?

**Love:** None of your business how. As for why, isn't it obvious? Cute Kip is one of the very few dudes worthy of being in our presence. He's tough in the ring and he knows who the boss is—me!

**Meltzer:** He hasn't fared much better against Kong than Sky or Rayne. Kong tossed him around like a rag doll and sent him out on a stretcher, the same as the two women.

**Love:** Dude, I swear you're fixated on Kong or something. Every question you ask is about her. Maybe you have a thing for big chicks, I don't know. Anyway, I'd rather talk about The Beautiful People. So go ahead and ask me the next question, Krewda.

**Krewda:** You and Velvet Sky seem particularly fond of cutting the hair of your rivals. Any fear that the tables could eventually be turned on the two of you?

**Love:** No, but they're all welcome to try. There's no one around here that's capable of knocking us down long enough to cut our hair. And if they got an ounce of brains, they know that even if they did succeed in the short term, there would be hell to pay. In the end, they're just going to be the one to get a makeover.

**Krewda:** What does Madison Rayne bring to your group? She's the youngest member and seemingly the weakest link, at least right now.

**Love:** Don't worry about Madison. She's fine, so long as she stays in line and lets Velvet and me lead the way. But get this straight. There are no weak links in Mi Pi Sexy—we're



all flawless and too much for anyone else in TNA to handle.

**Hunter:** Dissention is almost inevitable when you get a collection of ambitious wrestlers together. How do you plan to keep the group together in the long run?

**Love:** Wishful thinking, Liz. The Beautiful People are here to stay. I know what you're up to. You're trying to plant doubt in my mind. It won't work. The three of us are like sisters. I just happen to be the hottest and most talented one.

**Hunter:** Come on. You don't think your so-called sisters would want to

be in your place as Knockouts champion? What would you do if one of them asked you for a title bout?

**Love:** First of all, how dare you try to speak for Velvet or Madison and say what either of them wants to do? Being in The Beautiful People is an honor by itself, and they both realize I'm the rightful Knockouts champion. But to answer your question, if one of them challenged me, I'd accept the challenge and win. It's as simple as that, but it's not about to happen. Velvet and Madison have enough sense to know they want to stay on my good side. Well, I don't

have a bad side, do I?

**Krewda:** You've battled back from some significant injuries already in your career, including a torn ACL and concussion issues. Do you feel as though your toughness gets underrated because of your image?

**Love:** Wow, an actual intelligent question. I'm, like, shocked. My toughness definitely gets underrated. No question about it. I'm every bit as tough as any man in this business, but it hardly gets mentioned. All anyone ever wants to talk about is how hot I am. And, well, I am hot, but I also worked hard to get where I am. The ACL took a long time to rehab to where I felt 100 percent.

**Meltzer:** Who was your favorite wrestler growing up, and what inspired you to seek a career in wrestling?

**Love:** That's an easy one: Shawn Michaels. Whenever I watched him, I knew that wrestling was right for me: the image, the look, and the talent. I'll let you all in on a little secret. If you want to flatter me, tell me I'm the female Shawn Michaels. You won't get anywhere with me, but at least I'll know you got half a brain.

**Hunter:** There have been some good additions to the women's ranks in TNA, but there have also been some notable departures, especially Gail Kim. How would you rate the current caliber of opposition in TNA?

**Love:** I'd rate them inferior to me and The Beautiful People. Mi Pi Sexy are 10s, and anything less is inferior. There are plenty of good wrestlers in the Knockouts division, just not as good as us. As far as Gail Kim goes, who cares? She's yesterday's news.

**Meltzer:** One more question...

**Love:** Make it quick. You've got 20 seconds left.

**Meltzer:** What are your main goals for the next year?

**Love:** Just to keep on winning, keep on partying with The Beautiful People, and to keep reminding you all that you can look but you'd better not touch. Time's up. I'm outta here. □





## A Chance To Live Up To His Name:





# WILL MVP SURVIVE A PUSH TO THE TOP TIER?

TEXT BY **DAVE LENKER**

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**N**OT MANY PEOPLE saw it, of course, but as the WWE-randomizer-picker-spinner-thing bounced from face to face for the first time on the evening of April 13, 2009, Montel Vontavious Porter sat quietly backstage on a folding chair near the entrance to the ramp of the *Raw* set. Though the nearest TV monitor was but a few feet away from his face, he chose not to look at it.

As Rey Mysterio Jr., then of *Raw*, had just pinned ECW's Evan Bourne, it was time for the first random draft pick of the night, and to no one's surprise, it was a pick for the flagship brand. Maybe he was nervous, maybe he was hopeful, and maybe he was feeling so many different emotions simultaneously on this evening that he just didn't know what to think or to expect.

But whereas he didn't see his mug flashed on the screen, he eventually heard those three little letters that make up his nickname and heard the reaction of the crowd. He knew what it meant. He was moving from *Smackdown* to *Raw*.





At the lowest point of his five-month losing streak, MVP found himself dropping matches to Smackdown lesser-lights such as R-Truth (above) and Shane Helms (right), before rediscovering his groove. Now MVP finds himself fighting alongside Raw main-eventers Shane McMahon and Batista (opposite page).

He got up gingerly from his chair, looked toward the ceiling, drew in a single deep breath, and blew it out slowly. Whether he was seeking divine help from above for what was about to be or perhaps offering thanks to a greater power for what had just transpired, well, he didn't really let on, but within seconds, the time for introspection had passed.

He understood that he needed to put his performer's face back on. The bright lights of the cameras were waiting. It was time to be welcomed to his new home within a







home. It was time for his career in WWE to *really* begin. It was thrilling and probably more than a little terrifying to a man who knows far too much about fear.

This was what he had wanted. This was his shot.

♦ ♦ ♦

Young players in big-time professional sports—be it football, baseball, basketball, or hockey—get told a lot of things by the veterans who go out of their way to mentor them. One thing they are encouraged to do when they are on the verge of achieving the ultimate in their given sport is to live in the moment and enjoy it to its fullest. Get to the World Series in baseball or the NBA finals, for instance, and be sure that you get the most out of the journey,

win or lose. Remember it all and soak it all in.

The reason they are told this is that young players who get to play for a championship tend to think they will be back on the grandest stage of their sport time and again, year after year. For a litany of reasons, there isn't always a next year, another opportunity to be the best of the best.

Before some of them realize it, they're at the end of their career, and to their amazement, never have they gotten so close again.

Wrestling is a whole lot different than those team sports, you may have noticed. Success isn't always defined in such simplistic terms. There's a whole lot more that goes into it than the ability to throw the

best dropkick, deliver the hardest punch, or absorb the most punishment without going down. In those other sports, you put more points on a scoreboard than your opponent consistently enough, and people will call you the best when it's all over. Charisma is nice, but it ultimately doesn't matter much. TV ratings don't count. And locker room politics? They don't trump talent very often.

And yet MVP would be wise to heed that advice. Some might say he reached the World Series just by getting to WWE at all. But this chance he has now, it might not—probably won't—come again. He ought to just assume he won't be back in this position again, not if he doesn't take full advantage now.

See, for those who may not have been paying close attention, Vince McMahon in 2009 seems to have less patience than he has ever had. He tends to stick with what has worked in the past and doesn't always stick with new things that aren't working immediately. He's willing to give new ideas and new stars a chance, sure, but they had better deliver pretty quickly. If not, hey, didn't Ric Flair mention something about wanting back in? And don't McMahons on TV every Monday night always equal ratings?

♦ ♦ ♦

Most of us figured this moment—this window of opportunity—was probably coming for MVP. It was more when than if.

It's easy to forget that he had a few matches in TNA (anyone remember the name Antonio Banks?) and a nice run on the indy circuit in his native Florida half a decade back, but from the day he signed in 2005, he has been a WWE product through and through. After completing a developmental stint in Deep South Wrestling, he got a huge initial push with Smackdown, complete with the great ring name, gaudy Power Ranger-ish ring gear, and all the bling that he wears to this day, the rumor that he had a big-time sports agent negotiating a deal for



## A Decade Lost ... A Debt Paid MVP'S STRANGE JOURNEY TO SUPERSTARDOM

Maybe the reason MVP didn't complain too much about a ridiculous five-month losing streak or allow a few burns and a painful loss in an inferno match to Kane to get him too far down is because, well, he has been through a lot worse.

Try 9½ years in prison. To put that in perspective, if you had served a prison term of that length and just gotten out now, you would have missed the entire presidency of George W. Bush and then some.

That was only half the length of the sentence a judge handed him for armed robbery and kidnapping charges when he was just 16 years old. Get a close look at some of the ink that covers much of his body and you might notice that some of them are gang-related tattoos. He's not as proud of those as he is of the one of Malcolm X and of a few others. He got those while he was a teenager. Life wasn't good back then.

He joined a "graffiti gang" at age 12 and soon was running with a full-fledged street gang. A six-month stint in a juvenile detention center for robbery didn't deter him from venturing deeper into the criminal world. A far tougher lesson was in store.

"I grew up in Miami with a single mom," he once told the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. "My father (a police officer) was around, but I didn't have as much interaction in my life as I needed. I used to run the streets with gangs and guns and robberies. I made a lot of bad decisions, and one of those decisions got me 9½ years in prison."

It has been in a WWE ring, of all places, that he has sought and found redemption. When we reflect on all the adversity MVP has overcome outside the ring, maybe we shouldn't be so surprised that he's poised to finally become a top-tier WWE superstar.

—Dave Lenker

From the jailhouse to the penthouse



him, and the arrogance that just seems to come naturally.

After all these years and all its rival promotions going down, WWE still favors the stars it has more or less created from scratch. That's a bad thing for a lot of people (see *Van Dam, Rob*), but it's a very good thing for MVP.

A decision was made to give him an extended stay on the Smackdown mid-card and to let him pick feuds with a few of the more skilled wrestlers on the roster to see exactly what he had. He had surprising success in his first big feud with Kane, until he agreed to an inferno match at Armageddon 2006. Chris Benoit tested his technical skills for many months, and MVP did well in some pure wrestling masterpieces, even snatching the U.S. championship from Benoit in consecutive falls of a best-of-three-falls bout in May 2007 and reigning for nearly a year. The U.S. title may not have had the luster it had during the NWA glory years of Magnum T.A. and Nikita Koloff, but it still meant something.

That was followed by a long and bitter feud with Matt Hardy in which they simultaneously battled over that U.S. gold and also won and defended the WWE tag team title together. So within a couple of years, he had been exposed to some very good opponents who used a wide range of styles ... and he thrived. Oh, and don't forget his interview segment—the VIP Lounge—or a little tussle he had with former heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield on *Saturday Night's Main Event*.

All of that was, perhaps, in preparation for what he has now: real stardom. Or a chance at it anyway.

Of course, it doesn't hurt to see how a new guy with a potentially big upside handles adversity. He handled with great aplomb the news that he had Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, a heart condition that accelerates the heart rate, even incorporating it into storylines. Then there was the little matter of a five-month losing streak—August 2008 to January 2009. Somehow, when it





Showing tremendous grit and resilience, MVP battled his way back to prominence by defeating opponents such as Festus on the "blue brand." Now that he's on Raw, the two-time U.S. champion has an opportunity to capture a world title and a larger share of the spotlight. This may be his final chance at glory in WWE.

finally ended, MVP had beaten The Big Show, helped out Triple-H in the process, and turned fan favorite. It's pretty impressive when you can pull some momentum out of 20 weeks of losing. But let's remember that this is a man who spent nearly a decade in prison (*see sidebar*). He knows about overcoming adversity and remaining strong.

•••

It turns out that MVP probably needed that deep breath he took on the night of the draft. That and maybe a few more. He hasn't always responded well to adversity. Even though he emerged from that notorious losing streak in a good position, any wrestler that allows himself to get mired in such an extended funk probably shouldn't expect too many more shots at the brass ring from WWE.

Showing that he intends to establish himself as a main event player in WWE, MVP—within a week of moving to Raw—injected

himself into a feud with Randy Orton and Legacy, right there with Batista and John Cena. He's going for it, and rightly so. The U.S. title belt is in his possession again thanks to his victory over Shelton Benjamin during his last few weeks with Smackdown. And although WWE would have you believe that it's a big deal that the U.S. title is now property of Raw, MVP clearly has his eye on the gold wrapped around Orton's waist, the WWE title.

Fans clearly are excited to see someone new battling Orton (and Triple-H hardly qualifies as new). MVP has an unusual brand of charisma. Call it part Rock and part Terrell Owens of NFL fame. It's cockiness that's not quite crossing over into arrogance at this point, and people seem drawn to him. An unusual boost came from Sherri Shepherd, co-host of *The View*, who revealed to all her viewers that she was an MVP fan, then accompanied

him to the ring for a Madison Square Garden *Smackdown* taping, and even had him as a guest on the ABC morning show.

The stars seem to be aligning for him, but in wrestling, stars don't always stay aligned for long. Other stars, old and new, tend to shoot through the sky and push them aside.

MVP has had momentum on his side before during his WWE career, but this time feels like something special. But considering he's now a little closer to 40 than he is to 30, it might not feel so special for very long if he doesn't make the most of it. Starting the feud with Legacy was the perfect first move, but he has to build on it and then build on it some more, lest he settle for the consolation prize of being one of the more dominant U.S. champions in WWE history.

That would hardly qualify as living up to his name. □



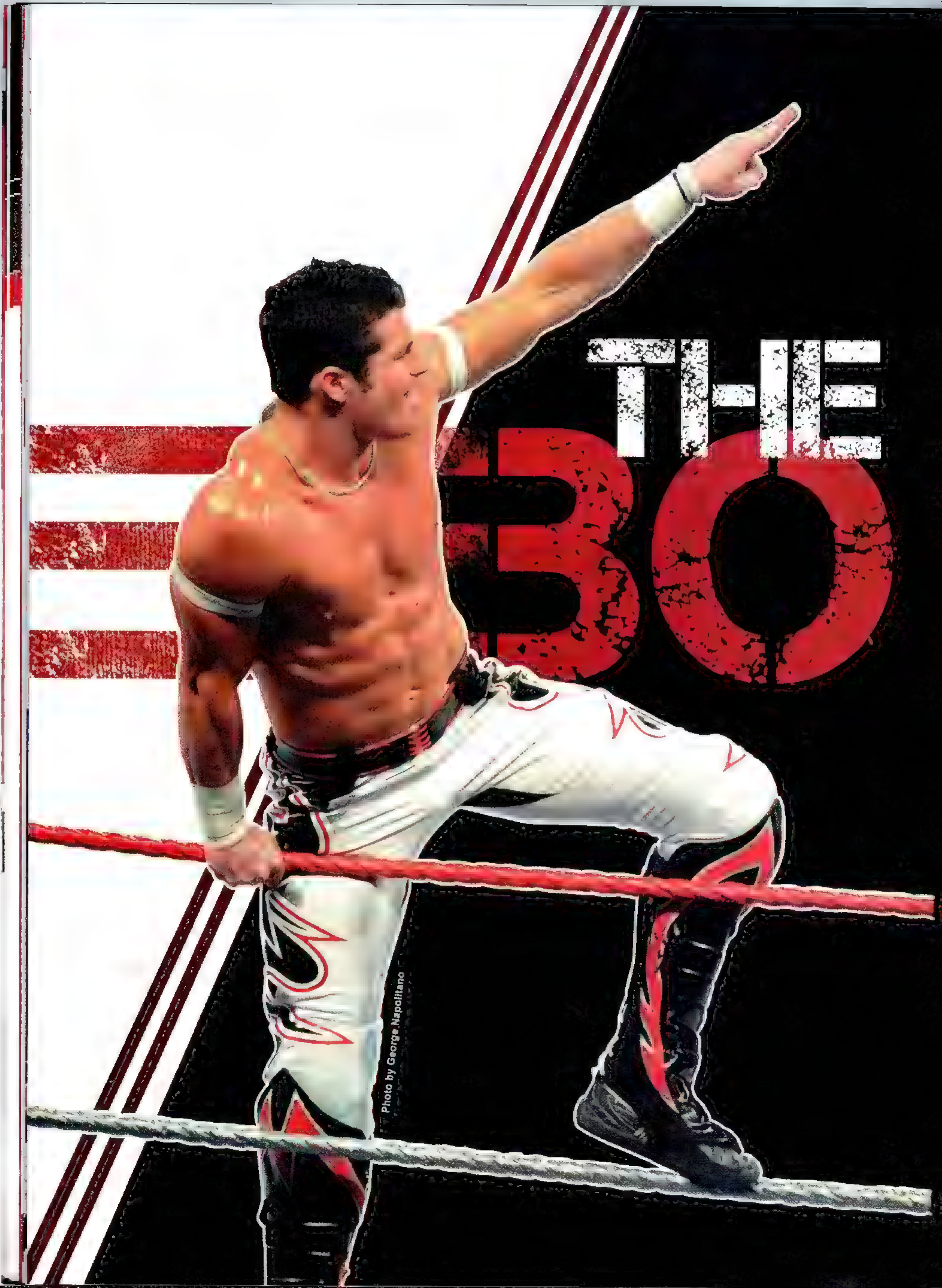


Photo by George Napolitano





# UPR ULTIMATUM

**WILL HE HAVE TO  
COMPROMISE HIS  
STYLE TO HAVE A  
LONG CAREER?**

**TEXT BY LOUIE DEE**

**E**VEN BEFORE HIS WWE debut, talent scouts touted Evan Bourne as one of the premier high-flyers the sport has ever seen. And since the moment he first stepped into McMahon-land, he's done nothing to dispel that assessment. His shooting star press is a thing of beauty, and thanks to the ease with which he flies around the ring, many pundits have labeled him the next Rey Mysterio Jr.





Evan Bourne's high-flying style has made him an instant fan favorite. The beauty of his shooting star press cannot be denied, but if he wants to have a long and fulfilling career, the youngster may not want to rely exclusively on high-risk maneuvers.

Not really a bad comparison. After all, Mysterio—former WCW cruiserweight champion (five times), WCW World tag team (three times), WWE cruiserweight (three times), WWE tag team (four times), WWE World (once), the 2006 Royal Rumble winner, and the current Intercontinental champion—has been nothing but complimentary of his style.

"Evan Bourne does remind me a lot of me earlier in my career," said Mysterio, who teams with Bourne on occasion. "But some of the stuff he can do even makes me look on in awe. He's got the charisma, the never-say-die attitude, and work ethic to make it big, no matter what people may say about his size. No one thought I would ever amount to much, either."

Quite the compliment, and obviously Bourne has learned from his limited interaction with Mysterio. But if there's anything else Evan should learn from his masked counterpart, it's this: What goes up, must come down.

Sure, Bourne's aerial-intensive, high-risk wrestling style is visually impressive, and has quickly catapulted him toward the WWE stratosphere. But it's called high-risk for a reason. Really, it's simple physics. The higher, faster, or longer something falls, the harder it hits bottom. Force equals mass times acceleration says that Bourne's shooting star press, even when he hits it squarely on his opponent, is going to take a much larger toll on himself than, say, a legdrop.

And with that toll comes a heightened (and more frequent) risk for injury. Any wrestling move done wrong can end a career in the blink of an eye; it was a simple attempt to Skin the Cat that ended Rick Steamboat's career 15 years ago. But when Bourne misses a shooting star press, for instance, the impact of his body hitting the unforgiving canvas is likened to falling out of a second story window—as opposed to say, a missed elbowdrop, which is more akin to tripping on a sidewalk.

Already, his high-risk style has resulted in injury. In a six-man tag team match in late-October, a suicide senton gone wrong saw Bourne land awkwardly on his right ankle, resulting in a dislocation and torn deltoid muscle. While the injury did not require surgery, he still missed nearly five months of action as a result.

Since his return in March, Bourne appears to have no lingering effects from the injury, but that doesn't mean he shouldn't have his doctor's number on speed dial. Air-Bourne is a thrill-maker, but he's also one bad fall away from catastrophe. If he were truly wise, he'd take a hard look at his all-out style and perhaps modify it. For inspiration, he need look no further than the aforementioned former WWE World champion.

Early in his career, Mysterio was like a super-ball, bouncing and flying around the ring in a whirlwind. He took Mexico, Japan, ECW, and eventually WCW by storm. Through the first phase of his career, he was an even smaller version of Evan Bourne. And he has the receipts from doctors' bills to prove it. He's torn his biceps, had multiple major knee injuries, and worked through countless other nagging injuries.

To his credit, Mysterio adapted; when knee injuries and age depleted his ability to take to the skies as often as he was accustomed, Rey honed his mat skills and became an even better all-around grappler—something he implores Bourne himself to work on.

"Trust me, there will come a time when that shooting star press isn't so easy," said Mysterio, who made his pro debut 19 years ago at the age of 15. "Bodies break down, plain and simple. I can still do the things I always did; I'm just more selective about when to do it."

But as Mysterio learned, honing your overall mat skills not only decreases the wear and tear on your body, but also gives you a better chance to win a particular match. "It only makes sense," he said. "You can't employ the same style against every opponent, every night." Even



if a pitcher can throw mid-90s, eventually the batters will catch up to the fastball if they don't mix in some off-speed stuff. It's the same with wrestling. If every move is from the air, your opponent will eventually catch on. And the smart ones figure out a way to turn your best offense against you.

"If you work on multiple facets of your offense," Mysterio continued, "it makes your high-risk stuff that much more effective. It energizes the fans, too, and that can really help energize you when you need that something extra."

For now, Evan Bourne seems content to wow the crowd and dominate his opponents with his breathtaking high-risk offensive strategy. But if he can slow it down just a bit,



Photo by George Napolitano

Bourne has begun to show some willingness to adapt his game. In a match with Paul Burchill, Bourne found himself resorting to a brawling technique after Burchill continually countered his aerial moves.



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Rey Mysterio Jr. has been in the business long enough to know what works, and what doesn't. Though he has toned down his risk-taking a bit, Rey still can take to the air when needed. This balance has helped prolong Mysterio's career.

become more versatile, and utilize his strengths at the right moments, that "Next Rey Mysterio" comparison may not be so far off the mark.

It's something he should seriously consider the next time he's on the injury list. □



Photo by George Napolitano

At Cyber Sunday, the fans voted Bourne a shot at Matt Hardy's ECW championship. It would be worthwhile for Bourne to study Hardy's career track to see how someone can round out their game to be more effective—and healthier.



# 30 AND COUNTING!

## A Celebration Of The *PWI* Years

**H**ulk Hogan. Sting. "Nature Boy" Ric Flair. "Macho Man" Randy Savage. The "Heartbreak Kid" Shawn Michaels. Bret "The Hitman" Hart. "The Total Package" Lex Luger. "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes. "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. The Rock.

Ten of the biggest, most important names in wrestling history. Ten of the most colorful personalities of all-time. Ten legends that left an indelible mark on the industry through their actions and accomplishments, and whose legacies will continue to endure for years to come.

Over the past 30 years, *PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED* has chronicled the unfolding story of the mat sport, through the "boom years" of the '80s, the Monday Night War, the post-WCW era of today, and everything in between.

As the individuals who have graced our cover space more times than any others, these 10 men have been at the very center of our own story. The kaleidoscope of their respective careers—diverse, spectacular, and sometimes controversial as they have been—they have in many ways come to define the *PWI* years, the magazine at times reflecting those very same qualities.

In this section, we offer a sampling of article excerpts intended to highlight some of the most pivotal moments and storylines of the past three decades that helped define who these characters were and how they fit into our lives as wrestling fans.

In this special two-part section, we aimed to give a look back at the past 30 years, or as we like to call them, "The *PWI* Years."

In the first part, we take a look at the 10 men that appeared on the magazine's cover more often than anyone. Accompanying each wrestler are their three most memorable cover appearances followed by a few excerpts from stories they were featured in.

While our goal was not necessarily to produce a definitive outlining of their careers, that result was practically inescapable.

Narrowing the list to include just five stories for each wrestler was not an easy task, especially for the likes of Hogan, Flair, and Rhodes, whose careers began before *PWI* debuted in September of 1979.

In the second part of this special 30th Anniversary section, Publisher Stu Saks offers up his year-end memories from the past 30 years. Stu became a *PWI* staff member beginning with the third issue, so he has been along for almost the entire ride. The majority of these "memories" are reprinted from the year-end issues of *PWI*. The years 1979-1989 were written specifically for this issue.

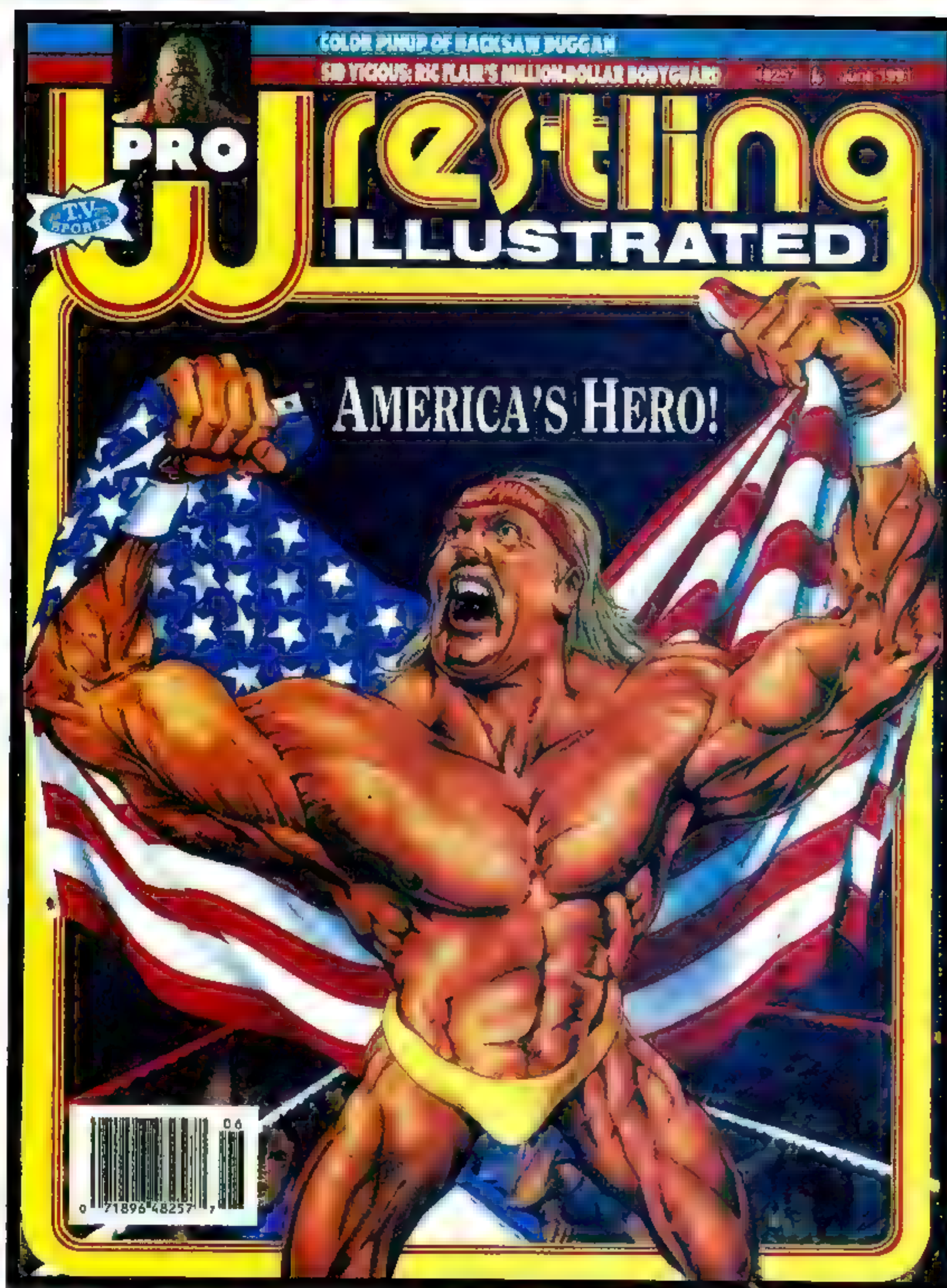
Special thanks to Stu, as well as Al Alven and Harry Burkett, for compiling this special section.



Stu Saks (circa 1979) and some other guy



# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## "Hulk Hogan At The Crossroads: Wrestling Or Hollywood?"

December 1982

To be a champion in professional wrestling one must give his all—physically and mentally—to the cause. And being a movie star takes an equal amount of dedication. The countless casting sessions, rehearsals, personal appearances, and wild all-night parties take their toll on a person's body. Nobody can succeed in both, not even a 6'8", 330-pound blond mass of rock whose ego allows him to think he can do anything.

"There's no decision to be made," Hogan insists. "I'll admit most men can't do what I'm doing, but I'm not like most men. I've always dreamed of winning the AWA belt and now that the dream is within my grasp, I want it

more than ever. But my phone never stops ringing. The post office needs a separate truck just to deliver my mail. It's those talent scouts from Hollywood and the movie producers. There's never been anything like 'Hulkamania.'"

## "Giant Killer! Hogan Topples Andre At WrestleMania III"

August 1987

Andre covered Hogan for the pin, and referee Joey Marella gave the three-count. But, Hogan had lifted his shoulder a fraction of a second before the third beat of Marella's hand, too late for the referee to reverse his arm's momentum. Andre thought he had won and protested the decision, but the match went on.

Just under 12 minutes later, after Andre had dominated almost the entire match without being able to score the winning blow, Hogan became a permanent part of history. His pin of the 7'5", 525-pound Giant after 12 minutes and 1 second marked the first time ever that Andre had been cleanly pinned.

The champ had erased all doubts, doubts that had built up over the seven years since his last meeting with Andre.

## "Halfway To Immortality: Hulk Hogan Targets Bruno's Record WWF Title Reign"

By Matt Brock

November 1987

Hogan might have a shot at coming close to Sammartino's record only because of his schedule of title defenses. Hogan's typical schedule has been to maintain an average of two or three title defenses a week, with occasional lapses of several weeks without so much as one title defense. By contrast, Sammartino put his title on the line nearly every night. At that rate, it would take three or four years for Hogan to defend the belt as often as Sammartino did in one year. Wrestling historians have estimated that Bruno defended his title well over 2,000 times during his initial title reign. That is an amazing record, and provides far more tangible evidence of Sammartino's brilliance than does the mere—ha! mere!—length of his reign.



# The PWI Years: ||||| Hulk Hogan

## "Hogan In WCW! Can 'Hulkamania' Survive In 'Enemy Territory?'"

By Chris Bernucca

November 1994

Hogan should have no problem educating WCW fans about "Hulkamania." He has another longtime friend, Gene Okerlund, manning the microphones, thus giving him countless sound-bite opportunities. Although Hogan's image has taken somewhat of a beating over the last few years, he is still immensely popular with children and can spread "Hulkamania" throughout WCW territory with public appearances.

Replacing Flair as North Carolina's favorite son is out of the question, however.

"Ric Flair could come to the ring with an Uzi, Hogan could have a flock of nuns with him, and a majority of the crowd would still cheer for Flair," said WCW fan Mike Bowlin of Carrboro, North Carolina. "Flair is more popular than [Charlotte Hornets star] Larry Johnson in these parts."

## "Hulk Hogan Told Us Five Years Ago That The NWO Would Take Over The WWF ... Why Didn't Anyone Listen?"

By Dan Murphy

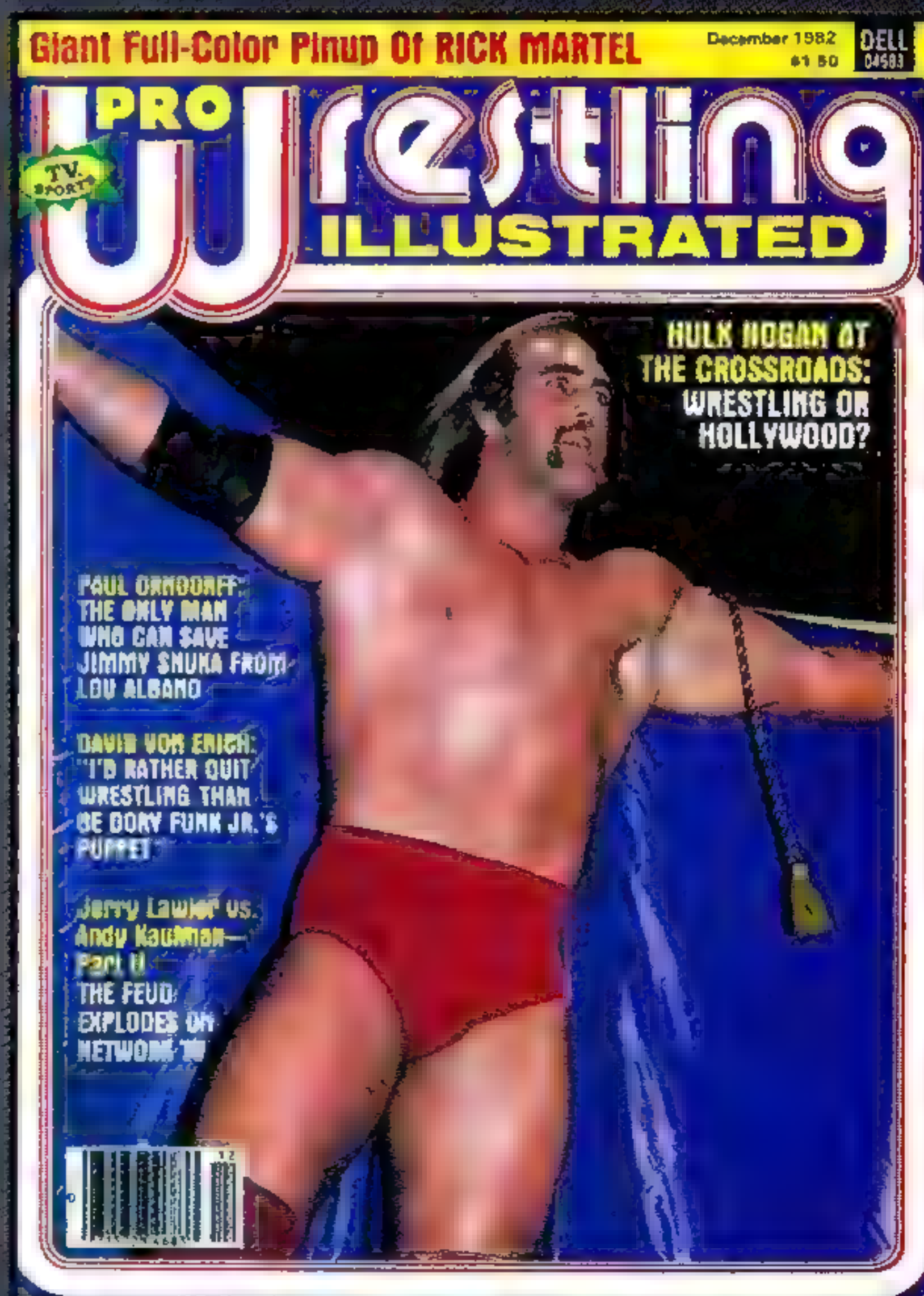
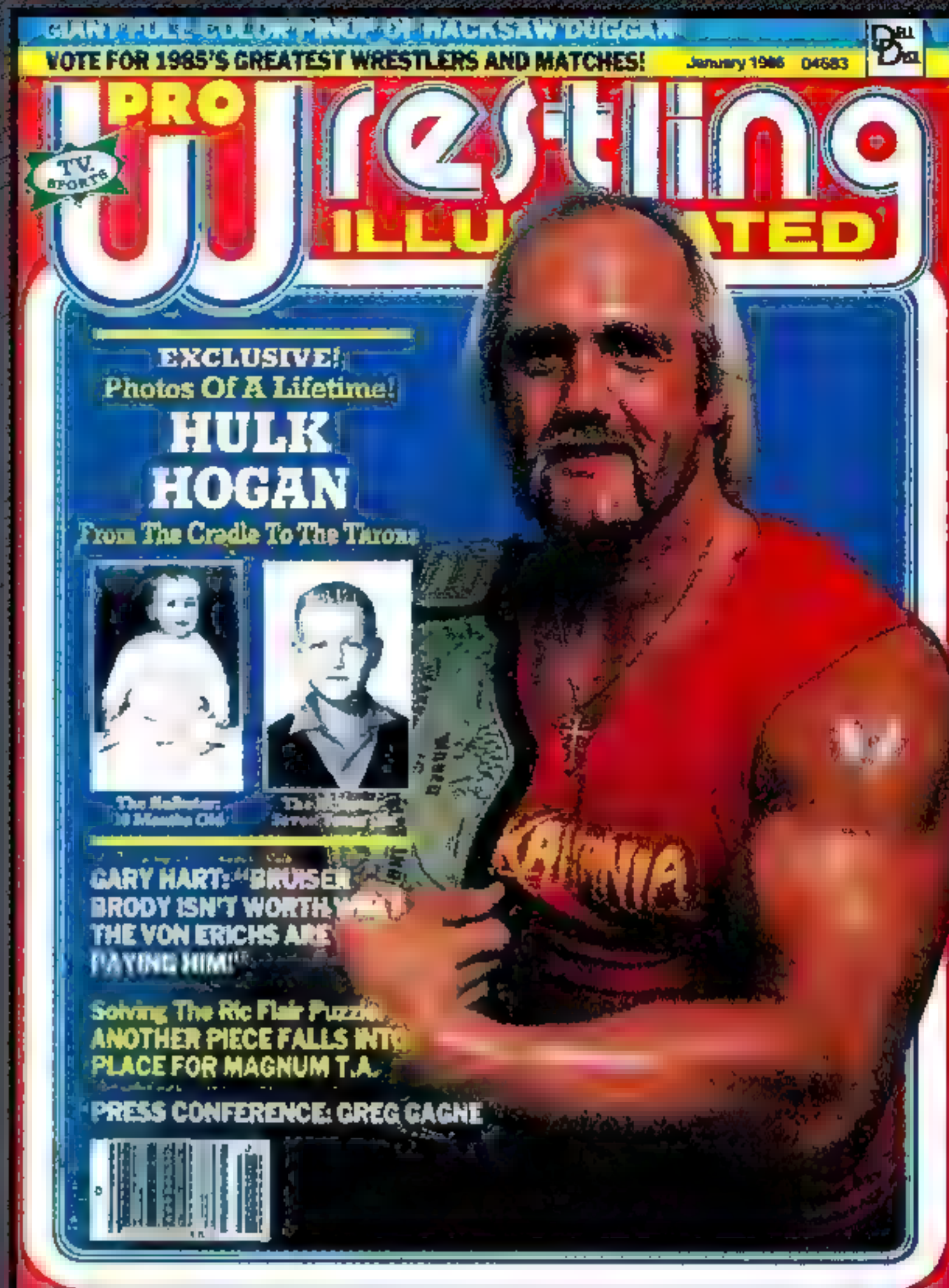
June 2002

Flash back to the winter of 1996. The NWO was really just starting its takeover of WCW. Basking in the renewed attention from the media, Hogan began holding impromptu press conferences following live events. For the most part, Hogan crowed about how the NWO was going to "take over WCW" and "destroy the tradition" of the company—the same message he delivered on every WCW telecast.

On this December night, a reporter asked what now seems to be an important question, and received an ominous and prophetic answer.

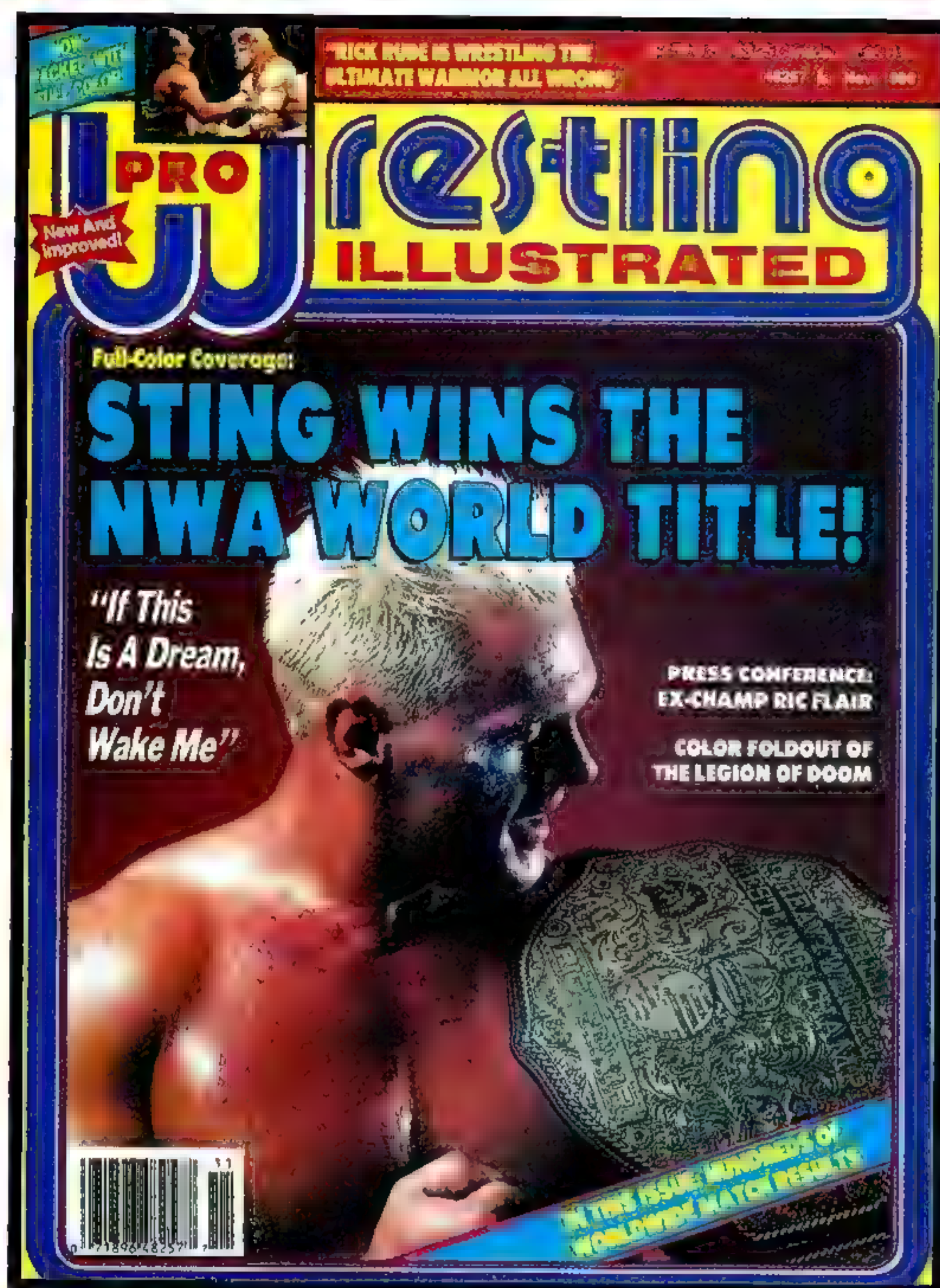
"You've got Eric Bischoff now. You're more powerful than ever. So let's assume you do take over WCW ... or wipe it out," the reporter said. "What happens next? Do you do the same to the WWF?"

Hogan paused. Then a twinkle came into his eye as he broke into a wide smile. "Why not?" he responded. "After all, WCW is on life support. You can go ahead and write the obituary now. If we ever get the chance, sure. I like the sound of that. The NWO is taking over the WWF next! Who can stop us? With the strength of the NWO, no federation is safe, brother."





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## "PWI Special Analysis: Sting Must Tell Eddie Gilbert To Buzz Off!"

By Peter King

July 1987

Eddie Gilbert's relationship with his fiancée, the beautiful Missy Hyatt, has severely taken him away from time he can devote to Sting. Apparently, Gilbert is spending more and more time with Hyatt and less and less time with Sting. Sting is at the crucial developmental stages of his career and he needs to be nurtured by a knowledgeable, dedicated manager. Gilbert is not only unwilling, but unable to teach Sting the finer points of the sweet science. Insiders at Sting's training sessions have told me that Gilbert has yet to show Sting one scientific maneuver. In fact, when Sting asked Gilbert when he'd show him the finer points of the game, Gilbert responded,

"There are no finer points. The only thing you have to do is break their arms and legs."

## "Sting Wins The NWA World Title! 'If This Is A Dream, Don't Wake Me'"

By Bob Smith

November 1990

There's no doubt that Sting is living the dream that hundreds of other wrestlers have worked for and failed to achieve. But for the "Stinger," pinning Flair in the Baltimore Arena at The Great American Bash meant much more than gaining his first NWA World championship. Indeed, he had a great deal to prove in the title match. After suffering a ruptured patella tendon on February 6 in Corpus Christi, Texas, there were many in the wrestling world—including some who were close to the young Californian—who insisted he would never wrestle again no matter how much physical therapy he underwent.

"Hey, I had my doubts, too," Sting admitted. "Some of the doctors I saw before my surgery said I'd be foolish to go back in the ring. But what good is living without wrestling? And how would I be able to live knowing it was Flair that put me out of action forever? No way, dude. There was nothing on earth that was going to stop me from fulfilling my destiny."

## "The Belt Proves Sting's The Best... So Why Won't The World Admit It?"

By Andy Rodriguez

August 1992

Everywhere he goes, the questions pursue Sting. Isn't Vader awesome? Have you ever wrestled anyone so good? Aren't you frightened?

"It's making me angry," said Sting, who has narrowly defeated Vader on a couple of occasions. "I am impressed with Vader. My matches against him have been the most difficult of my life. But until my shoulders are pinned for three seconds, or until I submit, I am still the champion. I wear the gold. People seem to forget that simple fact."

One ex-champion who can sympathize with Sting is Bob Backlund, who for six years defended the WWF title against the conventional wisdom that had him losing before many of his matches against larger opponents had even taken place.



# The PWI Years: ||||| Sting

"Fans will always overestimate a big man's ability to the same degree they will discount a small man's ability," Backlund said. "It's the nature of the game."

## "Sting To WWE? It Should Have Happened 10 Years Ago!"

By Harry Burkett September 2003

There's nothing more frustrating than peering through the mists of time and recognizing a missed opportunity, especially one that could have changed things significantly for the better. As Sting considered signing with WWE this spring, he must have regretted not making the move a decade ago. Sting, of course, was the NWA/WCW's franchise player practically from the time he burst on the scene in 1988 to his rafter-lurking days during the NWO invasion. He is the only major WCW superstar never to have wrestled for WWE. Would Sting have helped his career by making the jump in his prime? What kind of impact could he have made in 1993, compared to 2003?

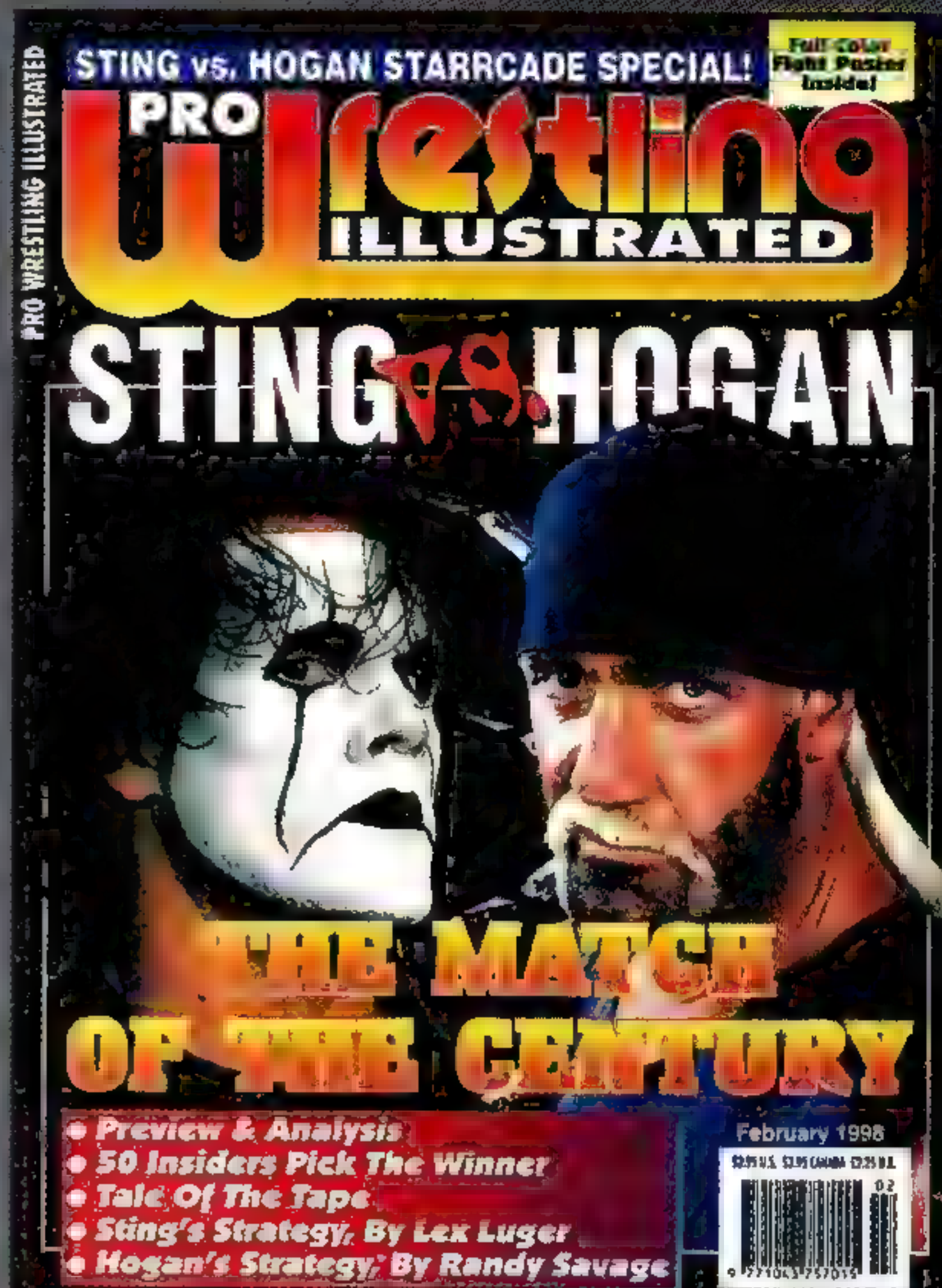
"Sting's signing with the WWF would have been major news in 1993, but probably no more newsworthy than Ric Flair joining the company—and that really did happen," said *PWI's* WWE analyst, Thomas Pilliard. "But even if Flair stole the headlines in the beginning, Sting's long-term potential in the company would have been much greater."

## "Get In There And Wrestle! Has Sting Lost His Confidence?"

By Will Welsh November 2006

Sting may not be the young, blond-haired surfer punk who took the wrestling world by storm anymore, but he's still Sting. He's still the man who put WCW on his back and carried it to success. He's still the man who faced down Hogan, Flair, Muto, and the NWO and lived to tell about it. He's still the man who strikes fear into the hearts of his opponents just by walking to ringside or ominously appearing in a darkened ring.

Hopefully, now, thanks to his win over Christian Cage, Scott Steiner, and Samoa Joe at TNA's Victory Road, he's remembered all of that, because the only thing that could keep Sting from being Sting is his own refusal to see himself for what he truly is: an all-time great.





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## "Ric Flair's Startling Confession: 'I Hate Being Champion!'"

October 1982

More and more people are noticing that Flair is beginning to consider the NWA title his enemy. He also considers it the most wonderful thing in the world. These two tensions are tearing him apart. Perhaps he's gotten too far too fast for his own good.

"Wrestling is a hard life," Harley Race says, "and a championship makes it even harder. The pressure is

intense. What's more, it never lets up. One slip, one mistake, one night when you're not at your best, and you're an ex-champion. When I held the title, I lived like a monk. It takes a certain kind of maturity to do that. Flair doesn't have the maturity. It's going to drive him crazy. It drives us all a little nuts, but it'll drive Flair around the bend."

## "Ric Flair: The Arrogance Of Greatness"

By Craig Peters  
November 1985

As the waitress filled both our glasses with champagne, I suggested—half-jokingly and half-seriously—that perhaps Flair was being a bit arrogant in his assessment of himself. He smiled.

"You've heard the old saying, 'It's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am?' Well, I only know of one man in this world to which that saying applies 100 percent, and that's me, daddy. If a person has all the credentials for greatness, I believe he has the right to make those credentials known. And if anybody has credentials for greatness in professional wrestling, you're looking at him, brother.

"Hey, I've got three NWA World title reigns to my credit,"

Flair continued. "That's nothing to sneer at."

## "Dump The Horsemen, Flair—A True Champion Stands On His Own"

October 1987

Since 1981, Flair has held the belt four times while virtually dominating the National Wrestling Alliance. He has impressed nearly everyone with his perseverance and unquestionable wrestling skills. His figure-four leglock



# The PWI Years: ||||| Ric Flair

is one of the most feared holds in wrestling. He is an outstanding athlete and an incredible performer. But he will not be remembered alongside former NWA kingpins such as Harley Race, Lou Thesz, Buddy Rogers, Jack Brisco, and Dory Funk Jr. That is the opinion of the editors of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, which has expended more time and energy chronicling Flair's championship reign than any other newspaper or magazine. Our conclusion is simple: Flair must get rid of The Four Horsemen. A true champion stands on his own!

## "The Man Again: Ric Flair Captures His Seventh NWA World Title"

By Bob Smith

May 1991

As Flair returned to the dressing room, the glories of his past came rushing back into his mind. The World title victories over Dusty Rhodes, Ron Garvin, Kerry Von Erich, and Rick Steamboat filled him with hope for his upcoming match. But, most of all, Flair focused on his win over Harley Race in 1983. That triumph ended Race's seventh title reign, which stood as the all-time record. At that moment, Flair went back to basics. Suddenly he realized that if he could defeat Sting, his legend could be established all over again by tying Race's record. He resolved to achieve victory the way he did during his "glory years" in the mid-'80s. No complicated schemes. No sneak-attacks by The Four Horsemen.

Flair opted to wrestle. And he won. The legend of the "Nature Boy" lives again!

## "Former Champions Debate: Should Shawn Have Laid Down For Flair?"

By Dave Rosenbaum

August 2008

"After the match, Michaels hugged me and apologized for beating me," Flair continued. "I told him he had nothing to be sorry about, that he shouldn't apologize for giving me the match of my life. And then I apologized to him for putting him in a position where he's going to be blamed for the rest of his life for retiring Ric Flair."

Asked what he would have done if he were Michaels and Michaels were Flair, Flair said, "Exactly what he did. Give it my all. Give him my A-game. Wrestle to the best of my ability and try to win. You see, when the bells sounds, all of that other stuff goes right out the window. It's just you and the other guy in the ring, and if you're a true champion, you have only one thing on your mind: winning."





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## **"Emotional Tug-Of-War: The Inner Forces That Are Tearing Apart Randy Savage"**

August 1986

Randy Savage is many men. He is a champion and he is a contender. He is in need of love from his chosen woman, Elizabeth, and he is similarly in need of that woman to fear him every waking moment of the day. He has a need to be popular and an equal and corresponding need to be hated.

Who is Randy Savage? He is a complex mixture of contradictory emotions. Should any of the above-mentioned elements in his personality begin to assert

more than its allotted share of control over his personality, it could quickly destroy the Randy Savage that we know today. To be sure, Savage is performing an incredible juggling act, keeping so many emotional balls in the air simultaneously.

## **"Ricky Steamboat vs. Randy Savage: Even WrestleMania III Cannot End This Feud!"**

July 1987

Those close to Savage and Steamboat had hoped for a WrestleMania III bout. They figured that it would be the culmination of the feud. With the Intercontinental title on the line, thousands upon thousands of fans in the Pontiac Silverdome, and millions more watching on closed-circuit television, how much hotter could the Savage-Steamboat feud get? WrestleMania is the World Series of wrestling, the answer to questions posed during the year.

But it was merely wishful thinking. Steamboat and Savage don't care about 90,000-seat football stadiums. They don't care about special guest referees and celebrities in the stands. They couldn't care less about worldwide press coverage and the national television audience. The tuxedo-clad wrestling officials are merely window dressing. Steamboat and Savage could wage their war in a hallway closet with nobody watching and it would mean the same.

## **"Macho Madness! The Torch Is Passed"**

August 1988

Savage climbed to the top of the turnbuckle once again, but this time DiBiase couldn't move away from the flying elbowsmash. Even Andre couldn't help him. Nine minutes and 27 seconds into the match, Hebner completed the three-count that made Savage WWF World champion. An ecstatic Hogan ran into the ring to congratulate Savage, then presented the belt to the "Macho Man" as the crowd roared its approval. When Savage



# The PWI Years: ||||| Randy Savage

hoisted a tearful Elizabeth upon his shoulder, the noise grew even louder. Hogan celebrated, Savage celebrated, and a whole world of wrestling fans celebrated.

Randy Savage's day in the sun has arrived! Macho Madness is running wild!

## "The Hogan-Savage-Elizabeth Triangle: Will The Megawoman Destroy The Megapowers?"

January 1989

Without Elizabeth, Savage wouldn't be nearly as popular as he is. Hogan knows this, and he also knows that he'll never get a shot at the WWF World title as long as Savage is a fan favorite. So, if Hogan is able to convince Elizabeth to manage him and drop Savage, the "Macho Man" would most likely fall out of favor with the fans. Meanwhile, Hogan would be more popular than ever. The scenario that suggests that Hogan is bidding for the love of Elizabeth is unlikely. Hogan is a married man—and married with children, at that! Back in May, Hogan's wife, Linda, gave birth to the couple's first child, a daughter named Brooke. Although the WWF has never revealed this part of Hogan's life, it is well known to readers of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED and its sister publications, as well as those who follow Hogan through the national media.

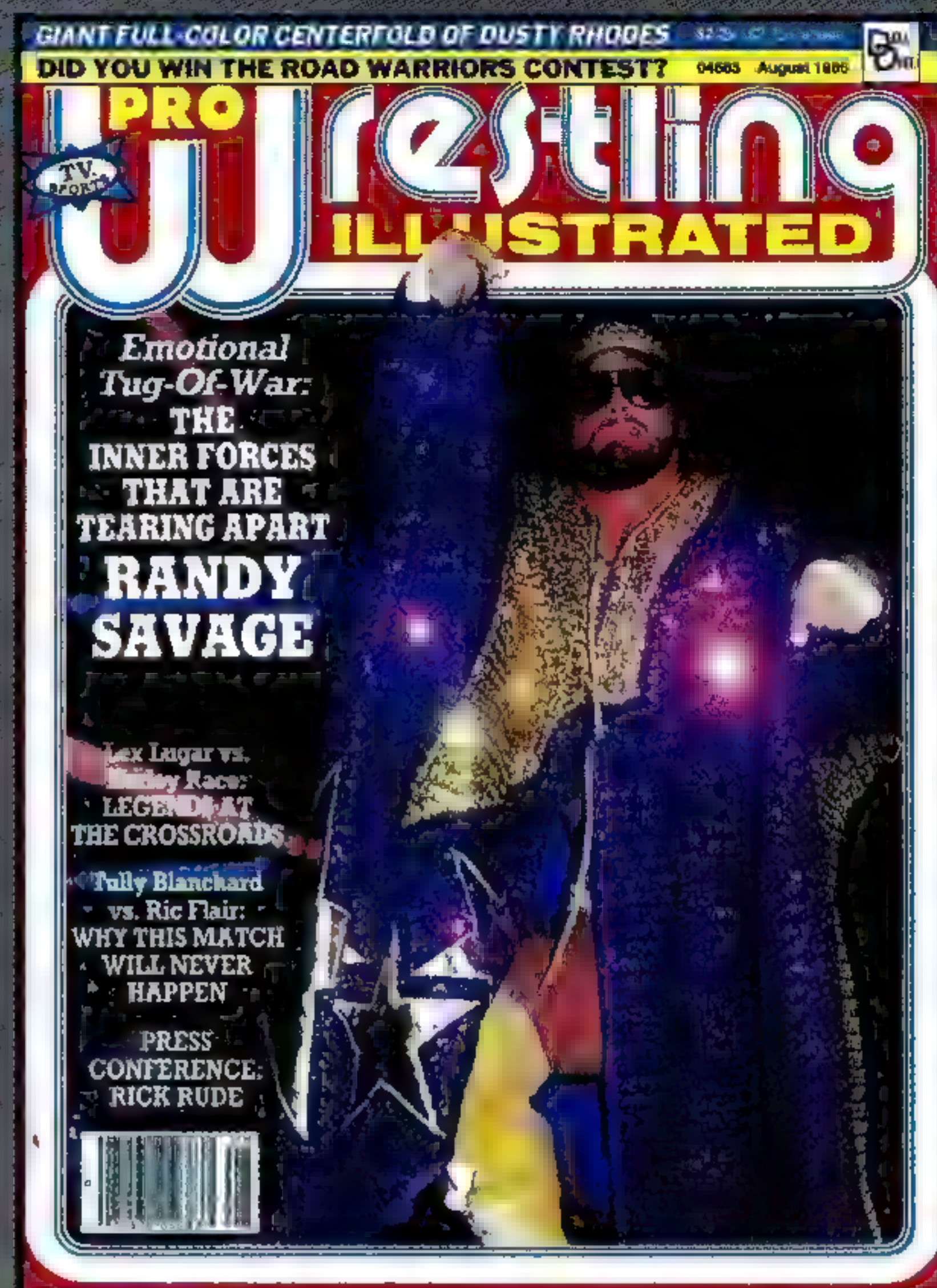
## "Randy Savage: Prepared To Fight The NWO To The Death!"

By Steve Anderson

February 1997

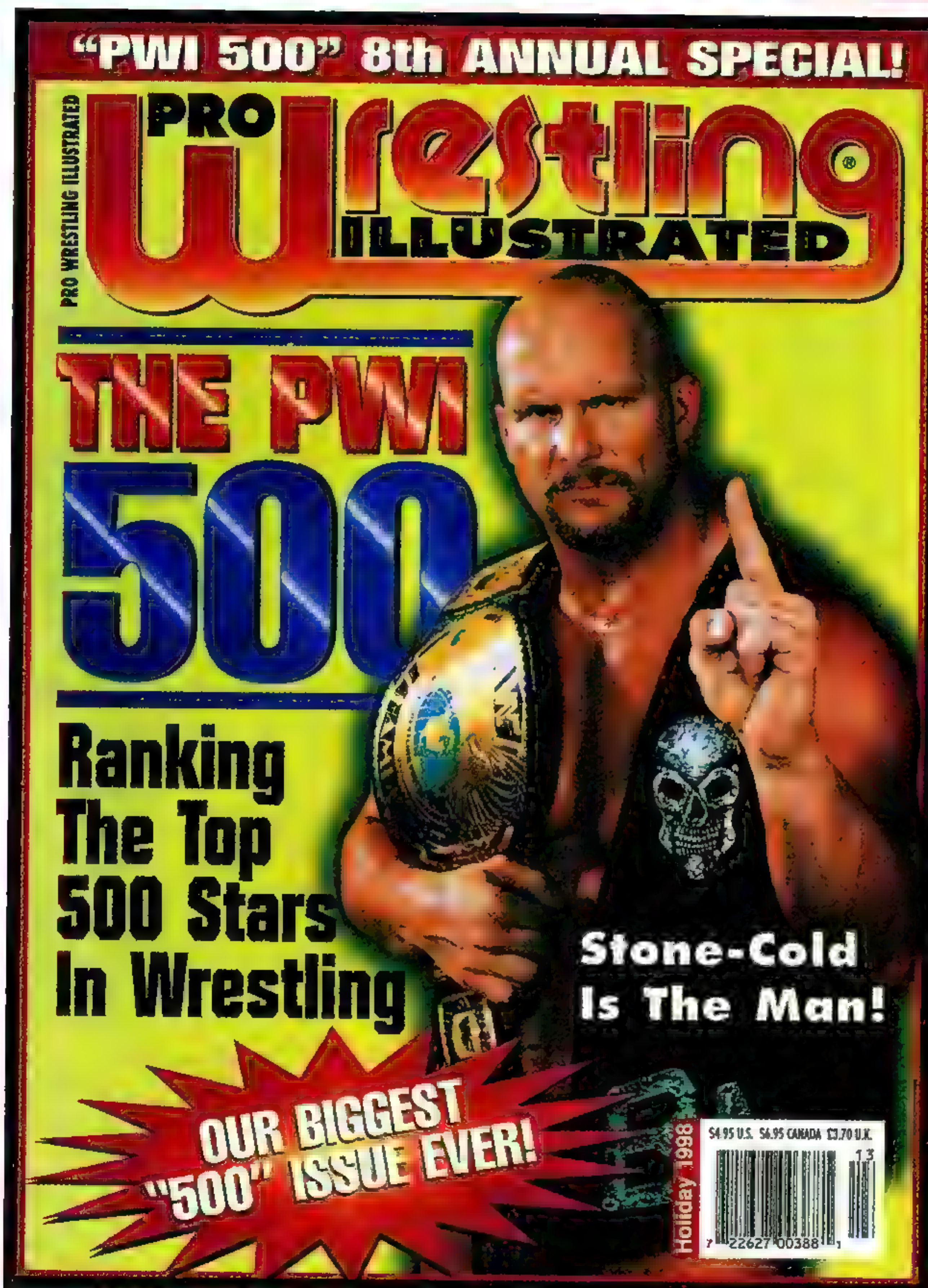
General Savage is fighting the NWO with reckless abandon mainly because the federation's former leader, Sting, is M.I.A. and has given no indication that he will be leading the charge for WCW again anytime soon. His feelings are still hurt. And because of that, Savage's body continues to hurt ... and hurt ... and hurt some more. Savage is putting his life on the line every time he wrestles. Sure, you can say that about any wrestler, but it's especially true for Savage now. Even when he isn't wrestling someone from the NWO, he knows that his match is likely to be interrupted by someone from the NWO. But no matter how many times he is stretchered out and no matter how many trips he must make to the hospital, Savage will dust himself off and go back to the ring for more.

To him, WCW is worth it.





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## "Screw The World—I'll Do It My Way!" Steve Austin's Timetable To The Title"

By Andy Rodriguez September 1995

What Austin wants to accomplish is obvious: He wants to win the WCW World title. However, he says, he is in no hurry, and on no one's timetable.

"I know I'm going to be the World champion someday," he states matter-of-factly. "I don't think there's any doubt about that. It could happen at any time, of course,

but I'm not expecting any miracles, especially considering what's happened before."

Austin is alluding to those times that, in his opinion, he was denied World title shots even as he held the U.S. championship. Traditionally, the U.S. titlist is the number-one contender to the World title. For Austin, tradition didn't always go his way.

## "Stone-Cold' Steve Austin: Natural-Born Killer!"

By Dave Rosenbaum August 1996

After arriving in the WWF, Austin put together a three-month winning streak that included victories over the usual suspects, plus an impressive list of wins over Aldo Montoya, Barry Horowitz, Savio Vega, Marty Jannetty, and Bob "Spark Plugg" Holly. His Million-Dollar Dream finisher—designed by manager Ted DiBiase and quickly perfected by Austin—again became one of the most feared holds in the federation, and it didn't take long for fans and wrestlers to notice the mean-looking guy with the shaved head was very serious, very determined, and very dangerous.

Now Austin has undergone another name change. The "Ring Master" is now "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, and that name fits, too.

## "Steve Austin: Stone-Cold And Uncensored"

By Bryan Ethier July 1997

From a journalist's viewpoint, "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin is the dream interview: He's feisty, controversial, opinionated, angry. He doesn't just give you a 10-second sound bite; he gives you a five-minute harangue on everything torturing his soul. But from a



# The *PWI* Years: ||||| Steve Austin

producer's viewpoint, he's a nightmare. You never know when that ornery Texan is going to spew a string of profanities.

This dichotomous nightmare/dream machine is rapidly becoming the star of *Monday Night Raw* not just for what he does in the ring, but also for what he spouts into a microphone.

## **"Has 'Stone Cold' Reached The Bottom Line? Why Austin Might Get Out While He's On Top!"**

By Steve Anderson

September 1999

Steve Austin is at a crossroads in his career. For so long, he desired to be a world champion and the most famous wrestler in the world. He has achieved both goals. "Stone-Cold" has made millions as a wrestler. He could make millions more as a mainstream celebrity if he does television shows, movies, and commercials. Publicly, Austin has stated that he probably only has a few more years of wrestling in him before he decides to move on. A whole lot can happen in two years. The manic popularity of pro wrestling could decline. His star could fall as well. Should he wait to take advantage of opportunities when they are in front of him right now?

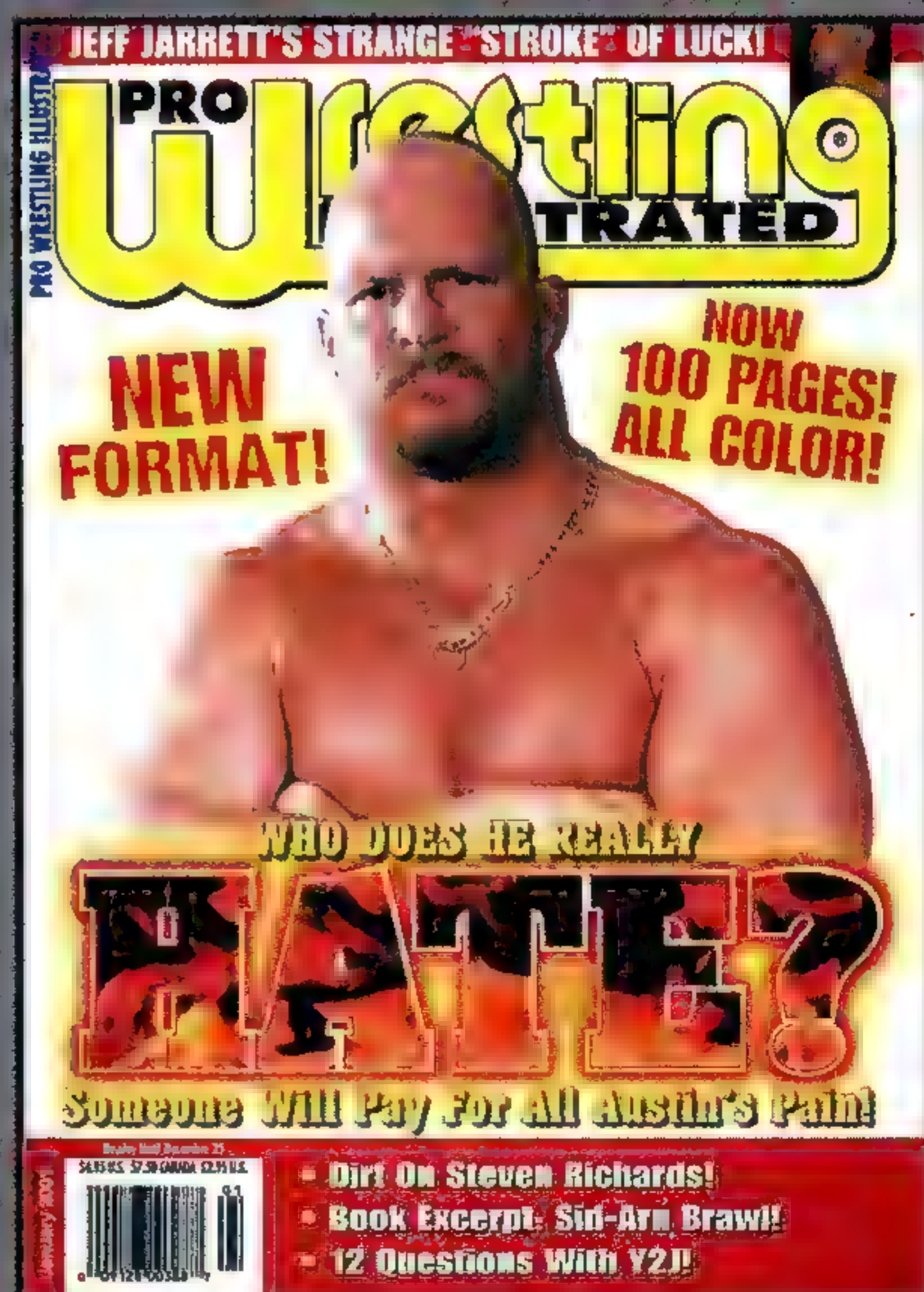
## **"Steve Austin: Haunted By His Past, Rejuvenated By His Future"**

By Will Welsh

June 2005

Despite "Stone-Cold's" bad neck, he constantly preaches that he has one or two matches left in him. Somehow, we doubt he's going to use up one of these matches in mid-card fodder feuds or in matches that we've already seen multiple times before. When Austin wrestles, his matches are going to mean something. One way or another, they're going to have an impact on the future of this sport.

For all of Austin's desire, he might never get Hulk Hogan in the ring. Yes, that's the one match for which a lot of WWE/Austin fans have clamored, but we just have to accept that it might never happen. Politics aren't the only thing in the way anymore. Age is a factor, and so is physical health. Neither man is getting younger, and neither is getting much healthier, either. Because of these factors, it's hard to even label the bout a dream match anymore. Five or six years ago? Maybe. Today? Highly debatable.





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August 1996

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**"Marty Jannetty & Shawn Michaels: Whatever Happened To Loyalty?"**  
By Chris Bernucca April 1992

About the only thing The Rockers haven't been called is loyal. Yet, through all the name-calling, belittling, and backstabbing, Michaels and Jannetty have always been loyal—to each other, to the fans, to the sport itself. Until now. Michaels and Jannetty are a tag team marriage about to break up. It isn't quite the seven-year itch—

they're about two years shy of that—but they are headed for divorce court, ready to cite irreconcilable differences. They have fought in private. They have fought in public. At recent matches, they have been too busy fighting each other to concentrate on their opponents. They have shunned their fans and shown a distinct lack of gratitude to the federation and the media. And they are soon to be ex-tag team partners.

**"Shawn Michaels: 'Enough Of This Kid Stuff, Give Me Ramon!'"**

By Dave Rosenbaum  
April 1994

If all is right in the WWF, this was the beginning of what could be a long war between the current and former Intercontinental champions. Michaels made the first move earlier in the evening, when he interfered in a match between Razor Ramon and Diesel. After Michaels pounded Ramon, the champion vowed revenge. That's just what Michaels wanted to hear. The two power bombs against the Kid were Michaels' answer. They meant, "I want you worse than you want me."

Give Michaels credit for going through Kid to get to Ramon. He knows the "Bad Guy" and the underdog are friends, dating back to the incident last summer when Kid stole Ramon's money and Ted DiBiase ridiculed the Razor.

**"The Iron Man Steals The Show: Shawn Michaels: Finally—A World Champion!"**

By Dave Rosenbaum August 1996

The Shawn Michaels vs. Bret Hart "Iron Man" match at WrestleMania XII on March 31 in Anaheim, Cal-



# The PWI Years: III Shawn Michaels

ifornia, was a classic in every sense of a word that is overused in sports these days. It was 61 minutes and 52 seconds of brilliant wrestling between two of the top wrestlers in the world. When it was over, Michaels had his first WWF World championship, and Hart was a defeated and slightly bitter man.

"I didn't know anything about overtime," Hart spat, but he should have known. Acting WWF President Roddy Piper said when he signed the "Iron Man" match that "there must be a winner." So although Hart thought he walked out of the ring with a moral victory and his belt intact after 60 grueling minutes, the small print in the contract must have said otherwise.

## Press Conference

September 2006

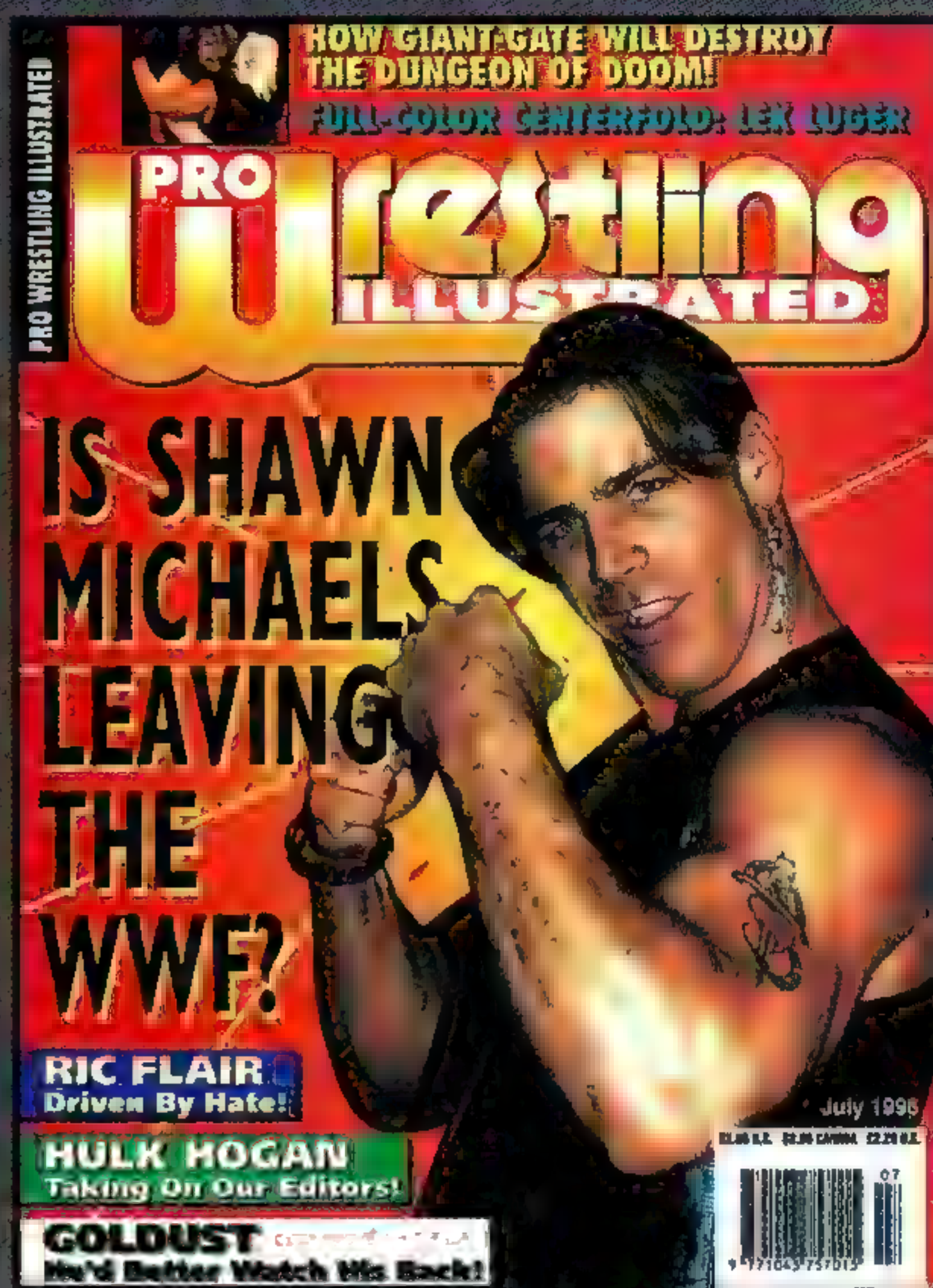
"[The Montreal Screw Job] is part of wrestling history and my personal history, so people are always going to talk about it—including McMahon, obviously—but I think most people understand now that it's just one incident in my career. I'm always, always living in today. What I do today is the only thing I directly control. It's the only way to make up for the things in the past you wish had been different. I won't turn this into a religious discussion here, other than to say I'm grateful to God for today, and I leave tomorrow is His hands. In this business, there are so many friends we've all lost, so many people we never got to tell how much we really appreciated. So my philosophy, in the ring and out, is to be grateful for every day and make the most of it."

## "Come Home, Daddy!" The Soul-Stirring Words That Ring In Shawn Michaels' Ears"

By Dave Lenker

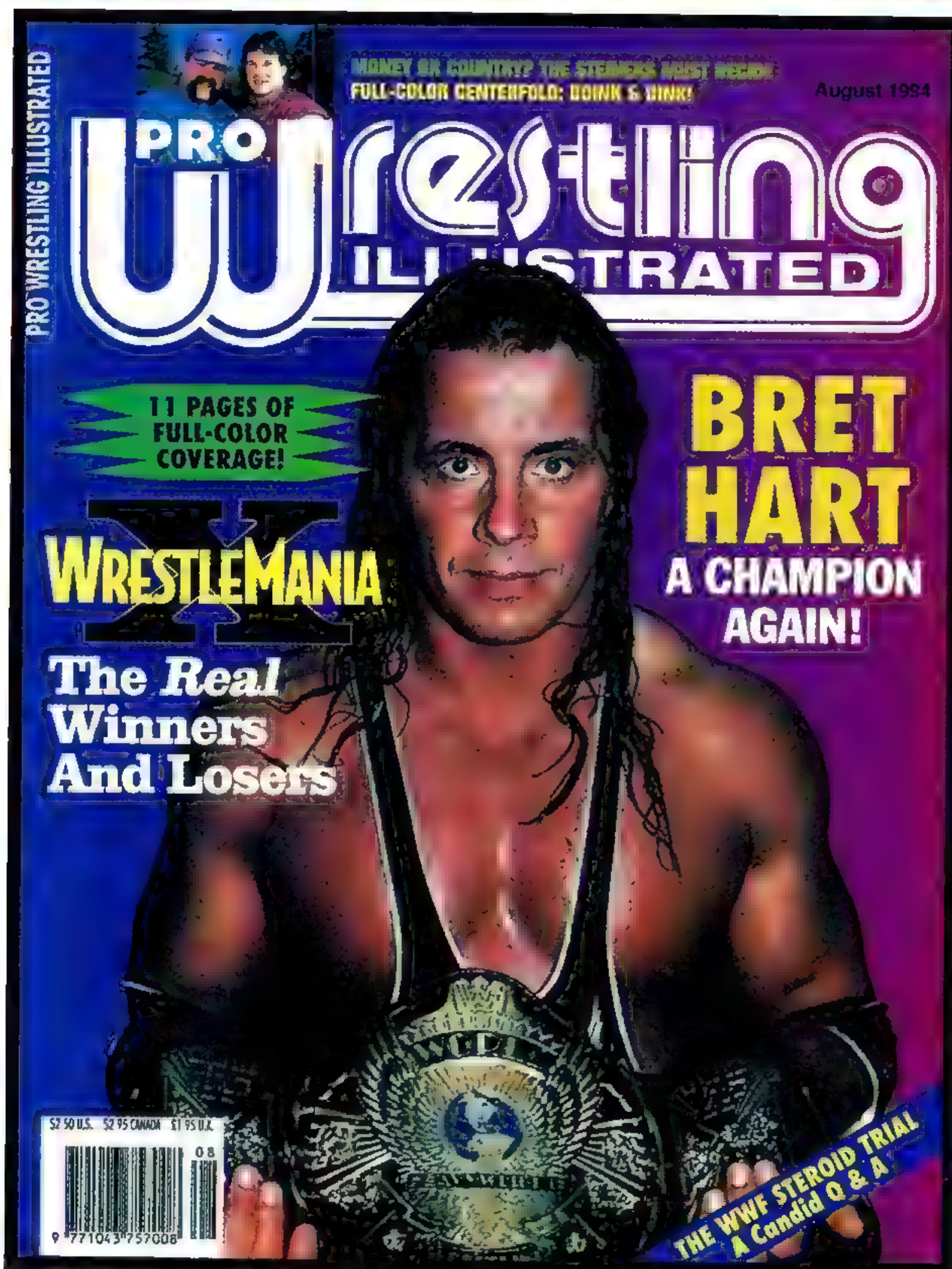
December 2008

When Shawn Michaels kisses his children's foreheads on his way out the door, to the airport, and off to who can remember what city this weekend, he does it by choice, and that's what bothers him. He does it for an entirely different kind of love—the love of being in the ring, of hearing his old (and quite frankly less and less apt) "Sexy Boy" music, of being adored by thousands and thousands of fans in every arena in every city and country in which he performs week after week. It does wear on him more and more every time he gazes into the eyes of his family and, traveling bags in hand, has to close the door behind him.





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## "WWF Champion Bret Hart: He Doesn't Take Any Challenge Lying Down"

By Craig Peters

July 1993

From scientific experts like Flair and Shawn Michaels to big, bruising brawlers like Razor Ramon, Kamala, and Bam Bam Bigelow, Hart has wrestled them all and beaten them all. There can be no doubts about the validity of his title reign or of any claim he makes to being one of the greatest WWF World champions. Since the moment he won the belt from Flair on October 12, 1991, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Hart

has brought honor to the title. The skeptics insist Hart's heavy defense schedule will ultimately be his ruin. Hart responds that the title is worthless unless it is defended, and he has no intention of being a paper champion.

## "Bret Hart vs. Hulk Hogan?! Why A 'Hitman'-'Hulkster' War Is Set To Explode!"

By Chris Bernucca

October 1993

A Hart-Hogan battle is not that farfetched, though Yokozuna has, for the immediate future, at least, removed any title implications of such a match by beating the "Hulkster" for the belt on June 13 in Dayton, Ohio. It's possible that Hart may get a rematch with the Samoan at SummerSlam '93 on August 30 at the Palace in Auburn Hills, Michigan. Hart impressively won the King of the Ring tournament, and the tourney winner may get the next title shot. Should the "Hitman" and "Hulkster" meet somewhere down the road, Hogan will get a chance to back up his words prior to WrestleMania. In a recent interview with the *Rockford (Illinois) Register Star*, Hogan said of Hart, "I can beat him with my eyes closed. He couldn't even lace my boots."

That quote hurt Hart. Not only was it ludicrous, but simply not the type of thing that is said about a fellow champion, current or former.

## "Riot On The Set! The Untold Story Of Bret Hart's Lonesome Dove Debut"

By Chris Bernucca

June 1995

Just as Hulk Hogan had before him, Hart has parlayed his success as a wrestler into opportunities outside the ring. He had landed the role of hunter/trapper Luther Root in a weekly adventure drama called *Lonesome Dove*.



# The *PWI* Years: ||||| Bret Hart

Best of all, the show would be filming on location in Calgary, Alberta, which would allow Hart to unwind from the rigors of wrestling around people he loved.

But the confusion of his true profession came crashing onto the set and nearly ended Hart's acting career before it ever got started. According to several employees close to the production of the television show, Owen Hart tried to continue his war with his brother by disrupting production and aggravating directors to no end. There was an actual physical confrontation between the brothers, proving that there are no boundaries to the hatred Owen holds for Bret.

## "Bret Hart: Is A WWF Return Still Possible?"

By Harry Burkett

September 1999

There's something eating at Hart. Austin has become the most popular wrestler in the world, and Bret knows he can defeat him. If Hart could beat Austin again, as he did at WrestleMania XIII, it would begin a new career chapter for the "Hitman." Even if Hart wanted to return to the WWF, would McMahon allow it?

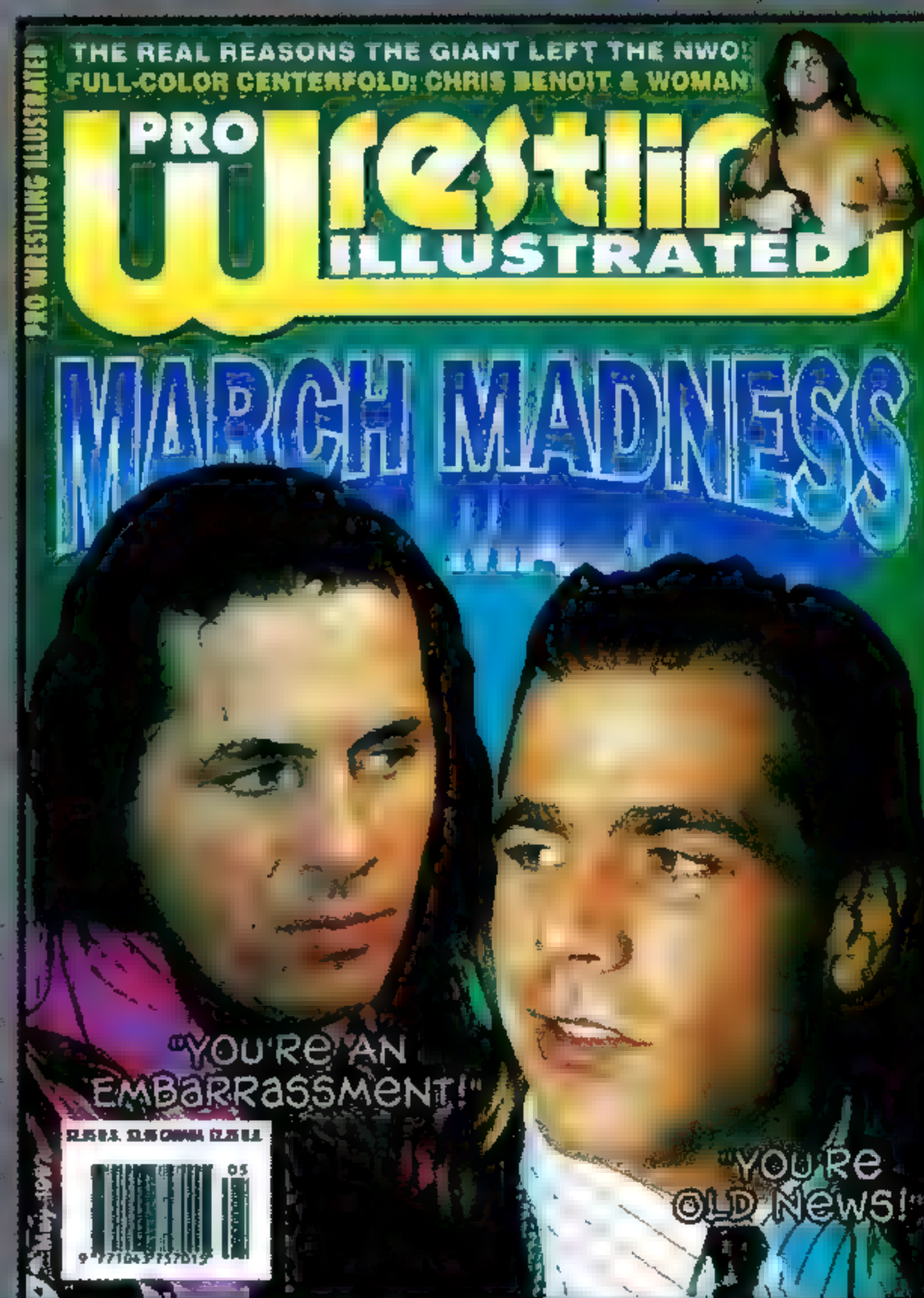
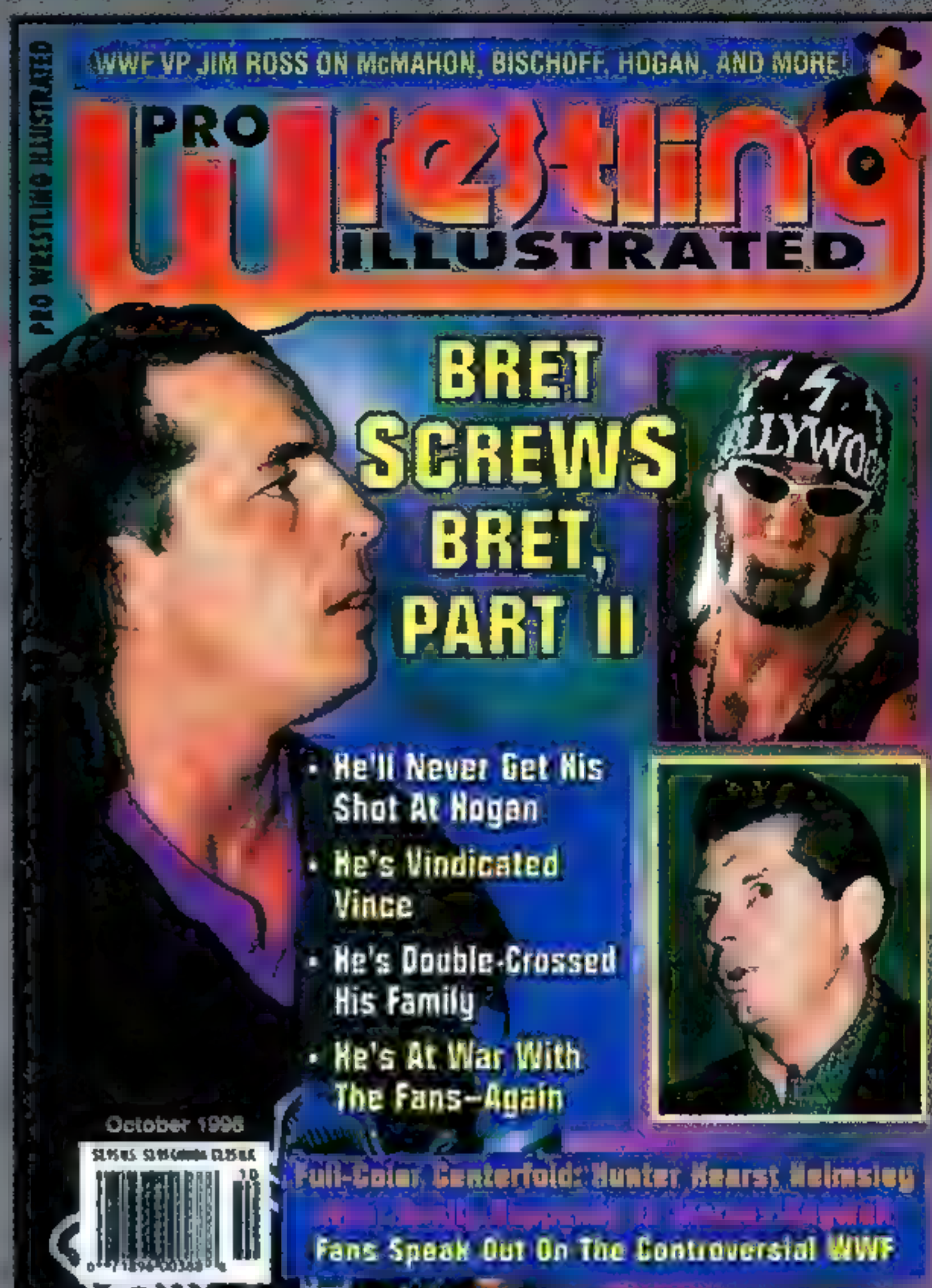
"If it resulted in a big payday, he certainly would," asserted WWF analyst Thomas Pilliard. "Traditionally, Bret Hart's presence on a wrestling card doesn't result in wild ratings booms, but he's a very controversial figure, and people are intrigued by him. Don't assume Hart's flat reception in WCW would continue in the WWF."

## "Bret Hart Completes The Big Six! (Maybe He Is The Best There Ever Was)"

By Dave Rosenbaum

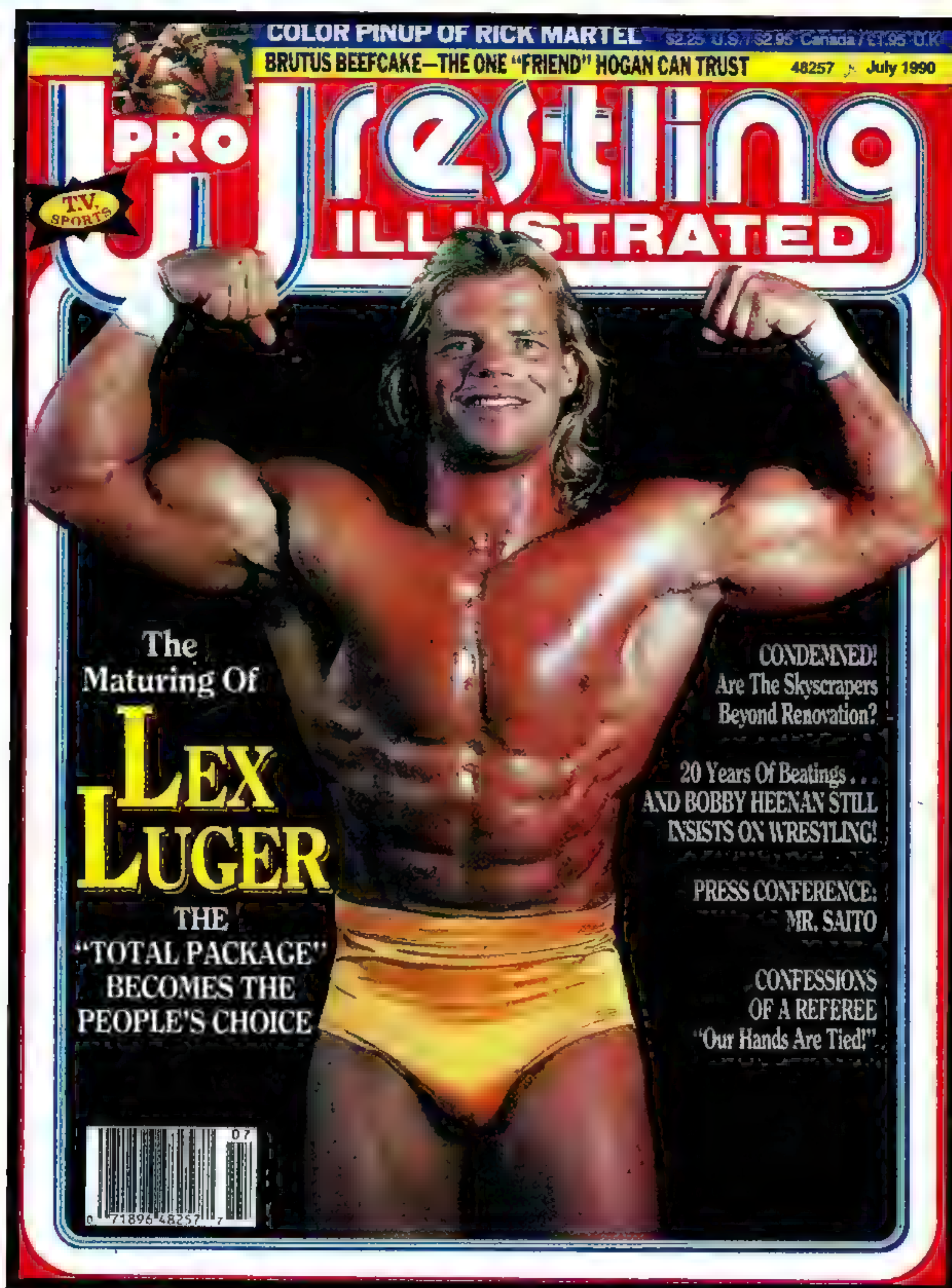
May 2000

Bret Hart has accomplished something that Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, Buddy Rogers, Lou Thesz, Bruno Sammartino, and all the other greats in wrestling history haven't or never came close to accomplishing: He has won every major title in WCW and the WWF at least once. Hart is the first man to ever win the WCW World, WWF World, WCW U.S., WWF Intercontinental, WWF tag team, and WCW tag team championships. He completed the big six on December 7, 1999, in Madison, Wisconsin, when he and Goldberg defeated Creative Control for the WCW tag team title. His run to immortality began on January 26, 1987, when he and Jim Neidhart—The Hart Foundation—beat the British Bulldogs for Bret's first WWF World tag team title. So the WWF and WCW tag belts served as bookends for Bret's magnificent career.





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## “Are The Horsemen Protecting Ric Flair From Lex Luger?”

July 1987

Flair was being set up, the victim of a classic sting. Barry Windham would come to the World Championship area first, reveal Flair's weaknesses, and soften him up for the kill. Then, after Luger arrived, either of the two would have little trouble winning the belt. So J.J. Dillon got on the phone and gave Luger a call. What he said probably went along these lines: “Lex, I have an offer for you. I'd like for you to become a member of The Four Horsemen. Of course, you'd have to start out by becom-

ing an associate, but the money I can guarantee you would be more than anything you could get by winning the World championship. How about it? And, by the way, if anyone asks, you're to say that you wanted to become a member of the Horsemen and contacted us. Deal?”

Deal. Luger was young and impressionable. He jumped at the opportunity.

## “Muscle-For-Muscle, Who's More Awesome: Hogan or Luger?”

By Bill Apter  
October 1989

There is little doubt that Luger is a better-rounded wrestler than Hogan, but our question is still unanswered: Who's more awesome? You're more likely to walk out of the ring with your limbs intact after wrestling Hogan. Although he has scored some dominating victories, he has not injured very many opponents. You're more likely to walk out a winner against Luger, who will occasionally make a mistake that leads to defeat. But with “Hulkamania” behind him, Hogan is a force unlike any that has ever existed in the sport. He is a two-time World champion and has held the belt for a total of nearly five years. In four years, Luger has yet to make his mark of greatness, though the three-time U.S. champion is further along at this point in his career than the “Hulkster” was after four years as a pro.

## “Luger's Holiday Gift For Flair: Has The ‘Total Package’ Wrapped Up The NWA Title?”

By Bob Smith

February 1990

There is every indication that Luger is a better wrestler now than he was last year. The “Total Package” has been a magnificent U.S. champion. He easily handled Ricky Steamboat and Tommy Rich—both former NWA World champions—and out-toughed Steve “Dr. Death” Williams.



# The *PWI* Years: ||||| Lex Luger

Luger is a man on a mission. He is a man with something to prove. In sports, the man with something to prove usually ends up on top.

"It could be a long winter for Flair," [Tommy] Rich said. "Luger's an absolute wildman these days, but he's able to combine his wildness with his wrestling ability. The man used to be a pure brawler, but now he can wrestle and he just keeps getting better and better."

## "The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The 'Total Package' Becomes The People's Choice"

By Andy Rodriguez

July 1990

Luger has shocked the wrestling world several times with switches from fan favorite to rulebreaker and rulebreaker to fan favorite. Is it possible that this time the change was final?

"It took me a while, but I learned my lesson," Luger said recently. "There comes a time when a man gets ready to do things the right way. It's the only way I can prove how good I really am."

If these words sound like those of a kinder, gentler Lex Luger, you're right. The "Total Package" has finally matured. On February 13, just days after putting Sting in the hospital with a ruptured left patella, Arn Anderson, Ole Anderson, and Ric Flair issued Luger an ultimatum. Luger had been named to take Sting's place in the Wrestle War '90 main event against Flair. The Horsemen wanted him to back out, too, but Luger stood his ground.

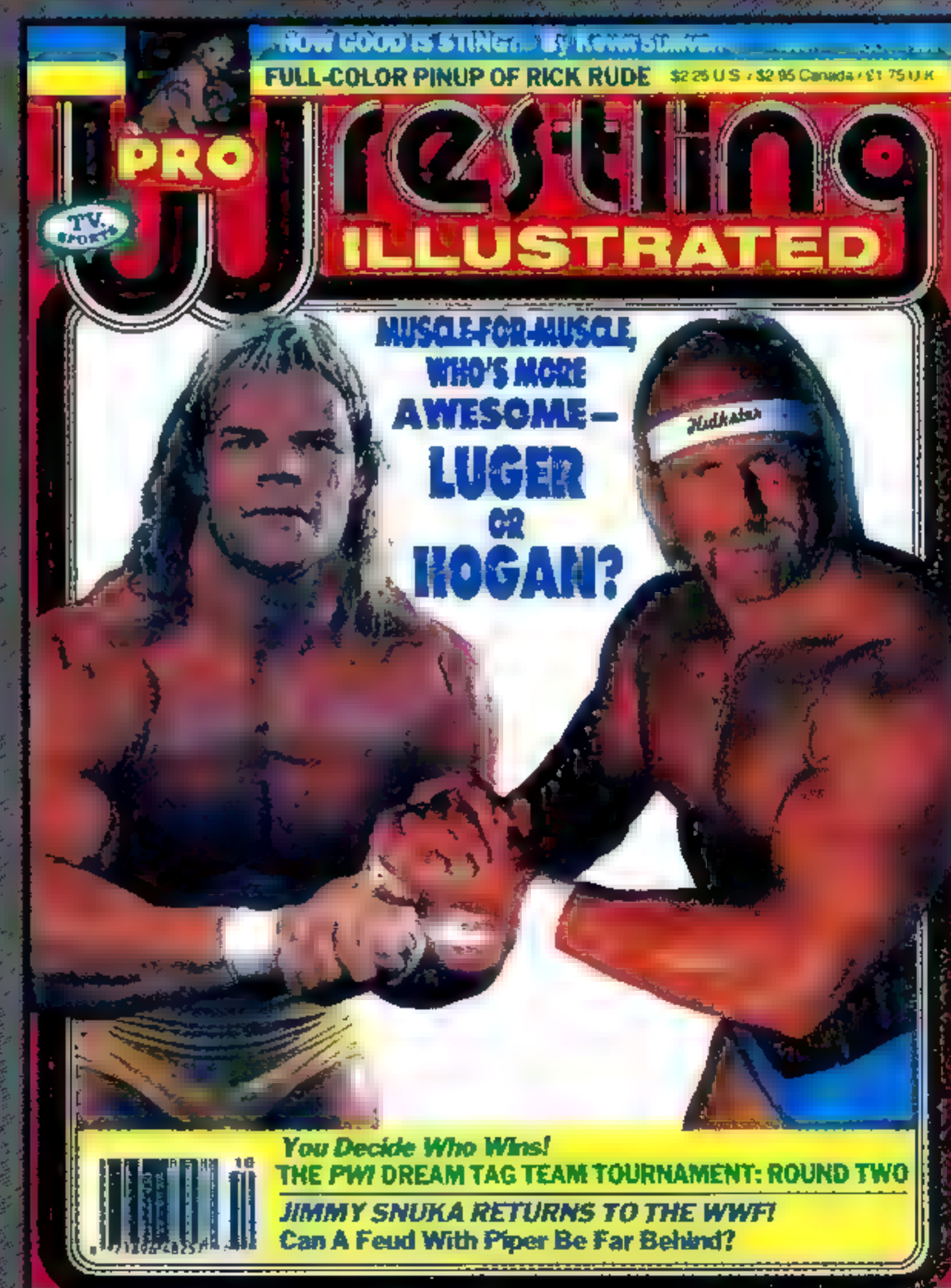
## "Breaking Down The WCW World Champion: Why Lex Luger Is Despised ... And Admired"

By Eddie Elner

January 1992

Since his triumphant debut six years ago, Luger has made a career of not being pigeonholed. He has defied labels the moment they are affixed to his muscular frame. As a result, we know not what to make of Lex Luger. Champion or bum? Hero or coward? Role model or disappointment?

During his latest incarnation, Luger has accepted the counsel of the notorious Harley Race and the interference of Mr. Hughes, a hulking bodyguard who selectively assists Luger in his championship defenses. With his new trio, Luger has courted fan disapproval and prompted one longtime Luger supporter to moan, "Not again. I can't believe Lex is doing this to us again. I can't take it anymore. I'm through."





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



## "Mascaras & Rhodes: Does Each Man Pray For The Other's Doom?"

September 1979

Neither Mil Mascaras nor Dusty Rhodes is a saint. Both have been involved in irrational feuds, often instigated by rulebreakers. They've had their share of brutal moments. They've done things they are ashamed of. But they are not capable of harboring evil thoughts for very long. Their quick eruptions of temper are often followed

by quicker apologies. That's what makes this story so unsettling. To accuse Mascaras or Rhodes with such self-centered concerns would seem unnatural. It is not. The facts, indeed, the sheer logic of it makes this conclusion compelling. Does each man pray for the other's doom?

## "The Violent World Of Dusty Rhodes"

July 1981

How many times had Dusty Rhodes been in this situation? Blood gushed from deep gashes along his forehead. Sitting at the training table, he awaited the doctor to come and stitch the wounds. Bloody, battered, aching all over, why the hell was he so happy?

The doctor walked in. He cleaned the wound and examined the cut. "Another Rhodes special," he declared, "maybe 15 stitches. Wrestlers like you are crazy. For some of you, it's only in the matches that are bloodbaths where you become majestic. You know how good you were tonight, don't you?"

"Yeah," Dusty said through clenched teeth, trying not to yell as the needle slipped into his flesh. "I know how good I was. And I know I was at my best."

## "Dusty Rhodes Wins The NWA Championship: 'A Dream Come True!'"

By Bill Apter

January 1980

At the opening bell, Rhodes seizes the offensive. Everything Race tries fails, though he confuses Rhodes by backing away, as if the effort is too much for him. Puzzling when you consider the great condition Race is usually in. Rhodes uses his bionic elbowsmash beautifully. Race staggers backward. Several times Race tries to go over the ropes from Rhodes' elbowsmashes.



# The PWI Years: Dusty Rhodes

According to NWA rules, Rhodes would be automatically disqualified if he sent Race over the top rope. But Rhodes catches Race and makes sure he stays inside the squared circle.

By now, the arena is vibrating with anticipation. History is around the corner. Race draws on all of his resources and nearly knocks Rhodes out with a kneedrop. Climbing the ropes for what he thinks will be a finishing flying headbutt, Race is fooled, landing instead on Rhodes' elbow. Three bionic elbow smashes, and it's over. Pandemonium. A new champ!

## "Dusty Rhodes & Nikita Koloff: Superpower Summit!"

April 1987

In any event, the fans are delighted by the pairing of Dusty and Nikita. "It's the greatest tag team of all time," said ringside fan Chrissy Donovan after watching Nikita and Rhodes beat Flair and Blanchard at the Charlotte Coliseum. "I always hated Nikita, but now I love him, and Dusty's always been my favorite. They're unbeatable. I think I like them even more than The Rock 'n' Roll Express."

That's high praise coming from a young, female fan in North Carolina, a state where the Rock 'n' Rolls are king. Yet it's typical of the kind of response The Superpowers have gotten throughout the country. This is a pairing that shocked the nation and took it by storm.

## "Imagine, Eeef Yew Weeel ... What A Prime-Time Dusty Would Have Done In ECW!"

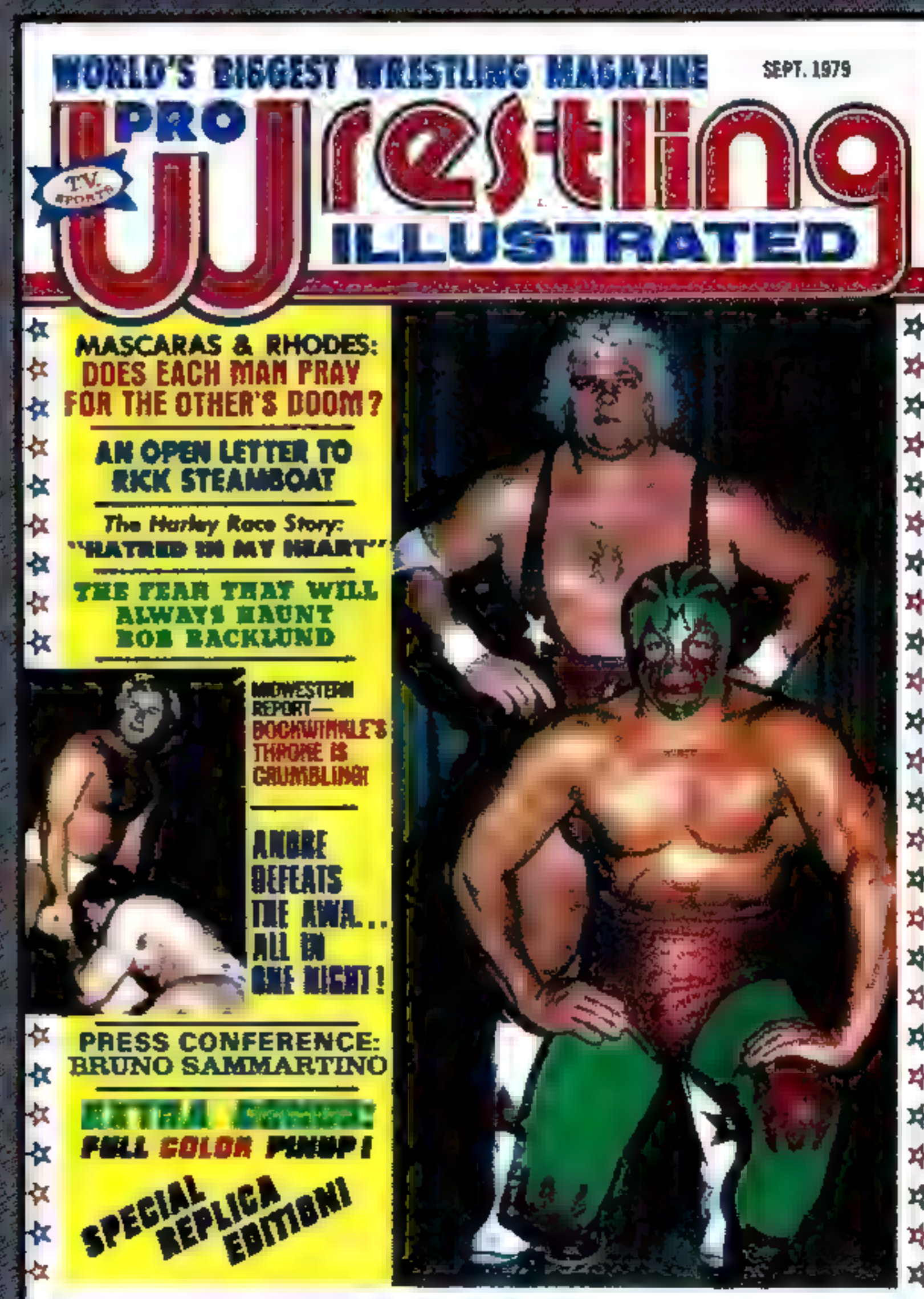
By Dave Rosenbaum

July 2000

If there were such a thing in the 1970s and '80s, Rhodes would have been the king of hardcore. Undisputed. Hands down. And just imagine what a prime-time Dusty would be able to do in ECW today.

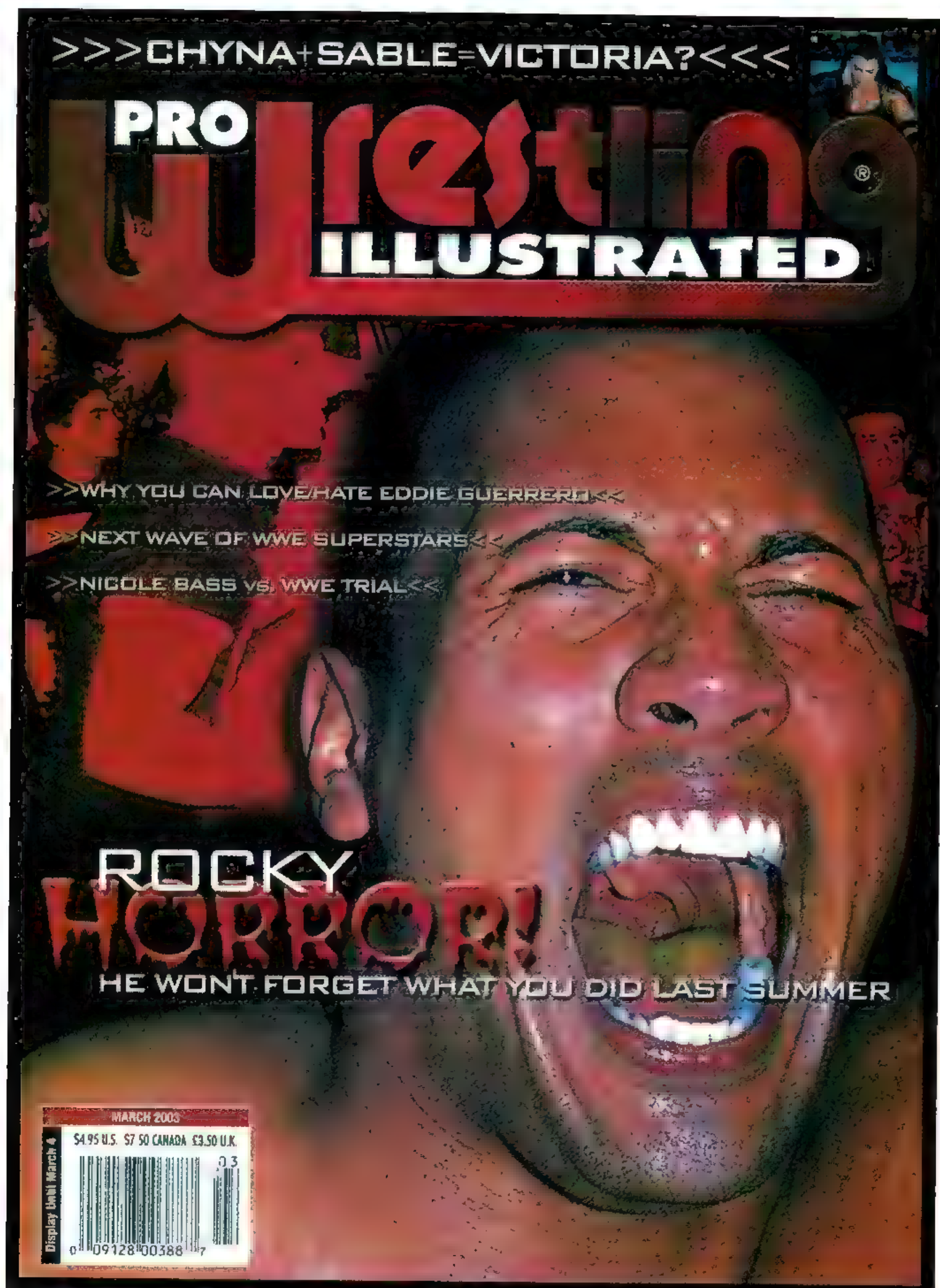
"I would've sent all them little boys home crying to their mamas," Rhodes said, obviously enjoying the idea. "Imagine—*eeef yew weeel*—'The American Dream' Dusty Rhodes getting inside that squared circle with the toughest son of a guns ECW could send my way and taking no prisoners 'til the cows came home. We'd separate the men from the boys for damn sure. I'd show these boys what real 'rasslin's all about, baby."

Actually, he has been showing 'em. Years after his prime, even years after he had apparently retired from the ring, Dusty Rhodes is in ECW doing what he does best: brawling and kicking some serious butt.





# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of



272-pound progeny of one of wrestling's most famous families. Maivia, the son of Rocky Johnson and grandson of Peter Maivia, has certainly evoked memories of his wrestling forefathers.

"He has the potential to go even farther than his father and grandfather, and they were great," assessed legendary manager Capt. Lou Albano.

It's hard to imagine a new wrestler entering the competitive WWF riding such a wave of expectations. Already he is being heralded—perhaps even groomed—as the WWF's next big superstar.

**"The Crock!  
The Title  
Change That  
Screwed The  
World!"**

By Bryan Ethier  
April 1999

"A new champion will be crowned at Survivor Series," vowed Vince McMahon. He was right in that respect, but he neglected to tell the fans the outcome of the tournament to decide the champion would be predetermined. You see, there was no way Vince was going to allow Steve

Austin to return to his post atop the federation. McMahon needed a pawn—a toady—someone to enforce his arbitrary rules and personal beliefs. He wanted someone to "do things the easy way." He wanted a butt-kisser. Amazingly—sadly even—he found his stooge in Rocky Maivia. He created the quintessential "Corporate Champion."

**"A Rocky Road Ahead?  
The WWF Is Expecting Too  
Much Of Rocky Maivia"**

By Bryan Ethier

April 1997

Like wistful, wide-eyed Sunny, every female in the WWF seems to have gone gaga over this 6'4",



# The *PWI* Years: ||||| The Rock

## "The Rock vs. Stone-Cold: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania!"

By Harry Burkett

April 2000

For The Rock, Austin is probably the only man who stands in the way of his total domination of the WWF. Last year, The Rock had the power of The Corporation and the World championship behind him. This year, The Rock is the people's champ. No matter whom he wrestles at WrestleMania XVI, The Rock won't hear a loud chorus of boos. No, what The Rock will hear is thousands of The Rock's fans chanting The Rock's name. Does that intoxicating popularity make The Rock more eager to eliminate the WWF's number-one anti-hero?

The third-generation superstar didn't mince words with his response. "The Rock smells what the people are cookin', and what the people want is for The Rock to take that bald-headed jabroni and send his candy [butt] back to Texas."

## "No Rock ... No Problem: The WWF Can Thrive Without 'The Great One'"

By Will Welsh

September 2002

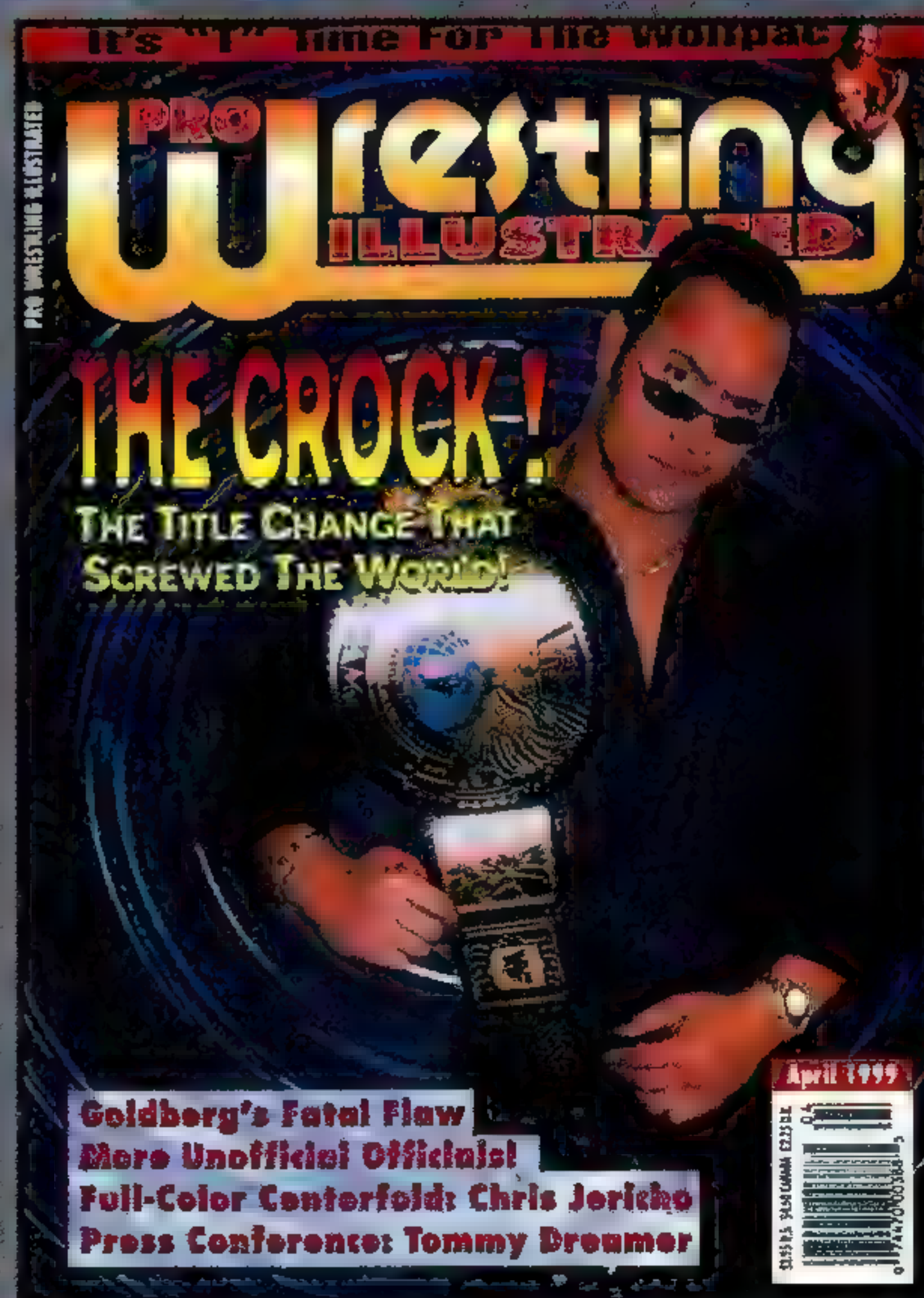
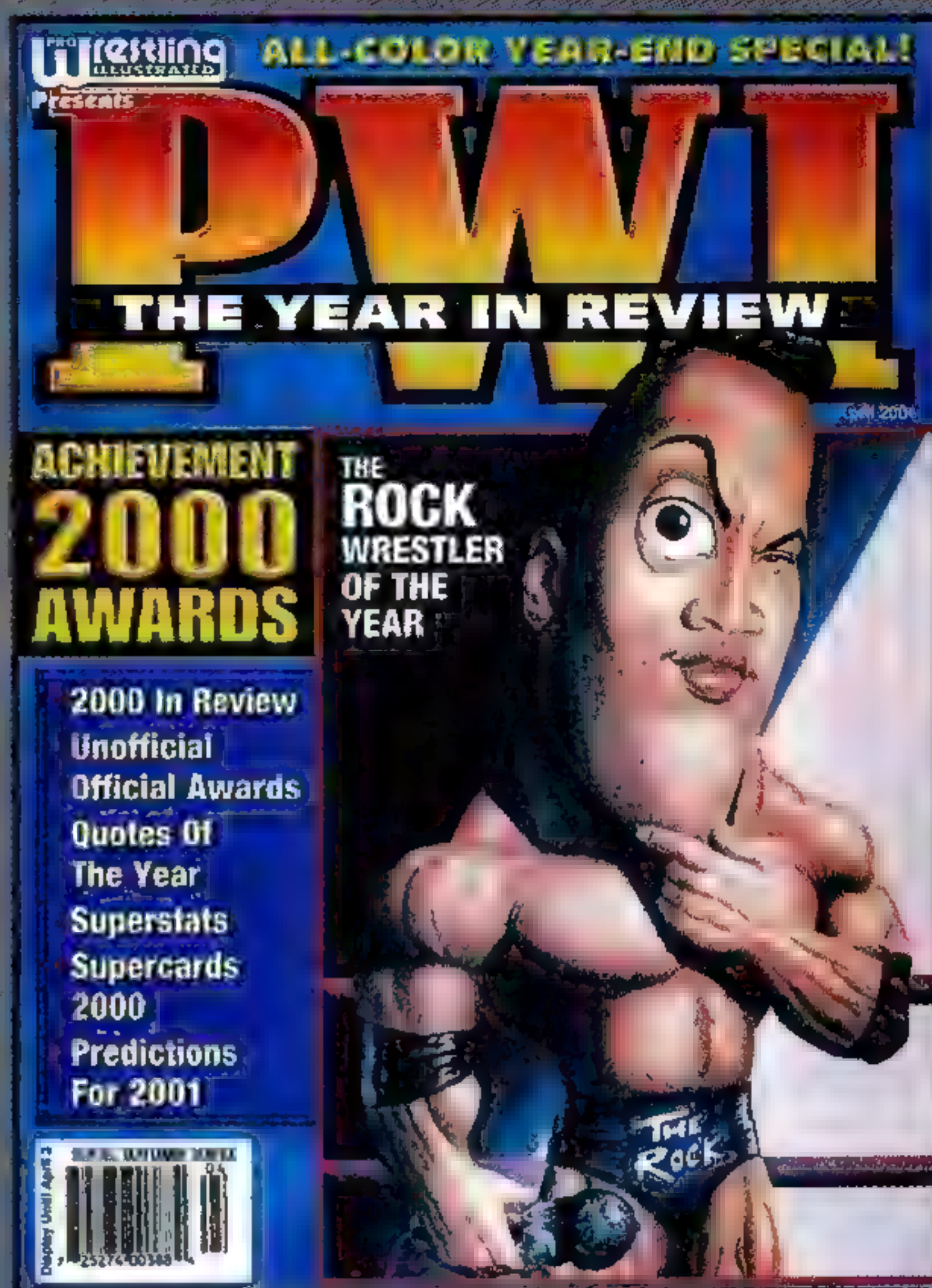
His timetable on his return to the WWF went from a couple of months to maybe a couple more months and then to who knows when. Rock's tone in the interviews changed, too. The way he was talking, he wasn't considering himself a wrestler who'd become a hot Hollywood commodity. No, Rock was now talking as an actor who would occasionally step back inside the squared circle and wrestle. If you're Vince McMahon and the WWF, that's not good news. Not good news at all.

## "Rocky Horror! He Won't Forget What You Did Last Summer"

By Frank Krewda

March 2003

Despite the firm grasp Rocky claims to have had on the situation, WWE executives handled the reaction less stoically. Backstage sources said Vince McMahon was so rattled that he ultimately decided to hold Rock off the air the next night at *Raw* for fear that the fans would boom him, cheer Brock Lesnar, and turn their entire program upside-down. And boo him the Madison Square Garden crowd did when his image appeared on the TitanTron during a video played before the show started. Had he appeared live to say goodbye for now to the crowd, well, let's just say it could have been an ugly sendoff for Hollywood's hottest new action film megastar.





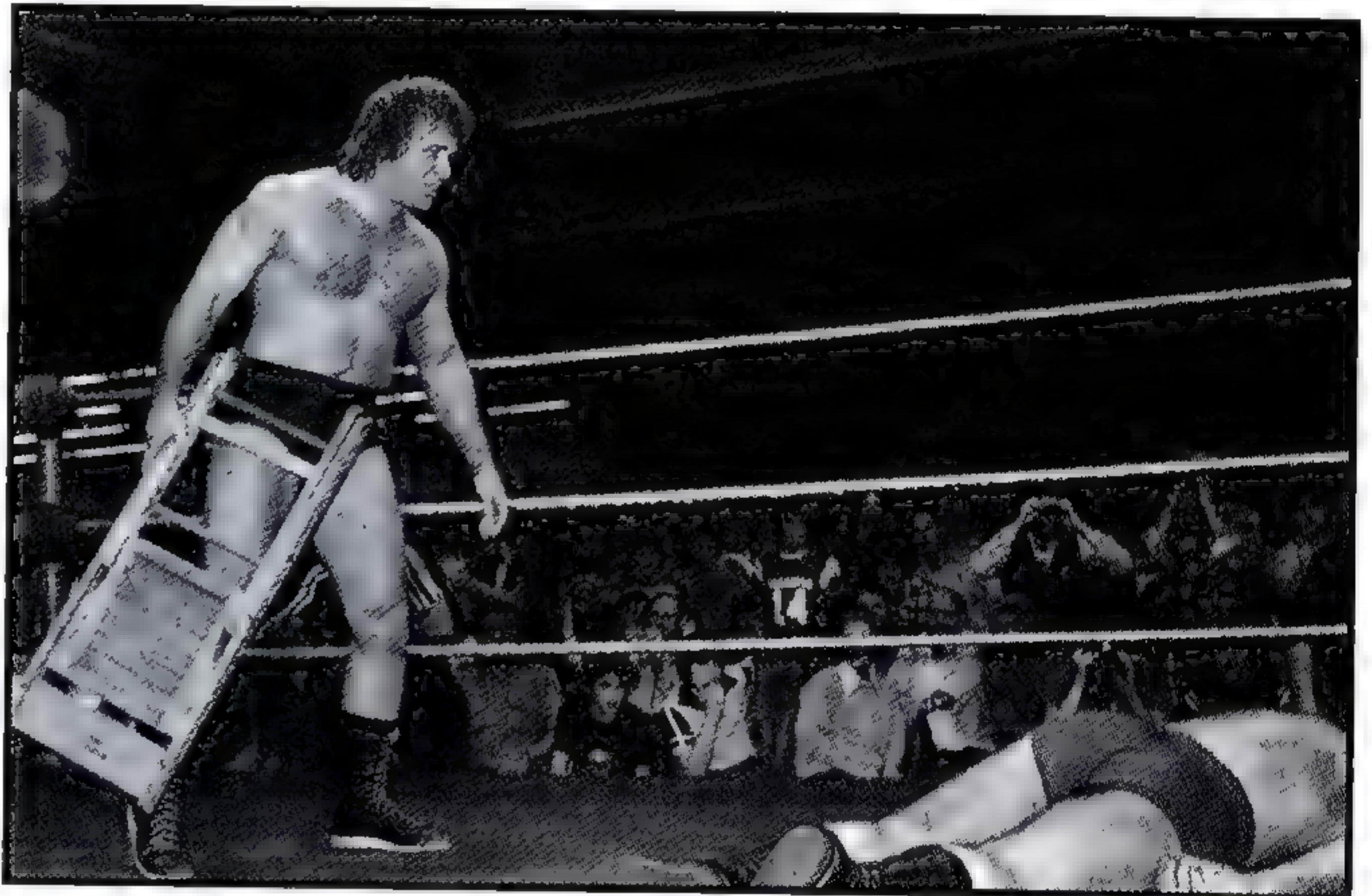
# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of

## 1979

"How's work?" my not-yet-employed-and-loving-life-housemates would ask after I drove home an hour and change through rush-hour traffic. The employment market wasn't so bad then, and these guys knew they'd get jobs eventually. But for now, it was fun to tease the guy who had to leave the perpetual party early so he could get up at 7. I'm not sure they believed me when I told them that not only was my work more fun than their leisure, I was actually getting paid \$250 a week to boot! Bill Apter, Peter King, Steve Farhood, Gary Morgenstein, Ken Morgan, Dan Shocket, Natalie Carollo, Karl Hlavac, and even the boss, Stanley Weston—what a cast of characters! 'Crazier than the wrestlers. How's work? Are you serious?

## 1980

Larry Zbyszko told me he couldn't even stand the smell of Italian food anymore. Yet Italian food used to be Larry's favorite. He ate dinner with the Sammartino family at least twice a week. If he were to change his name to Larry Sammartino, nobody in the family would have even noticed. Bruno was his away-from-home father; Bruno's son was his away-from-home brother. The feud that started when Zbyszko bashed his mentor's head with a wooden chair culminated in New York within the confines of a steel



Zbyszko admires his handiwork

cage at one of the biggest wrestling cards of all-time. Zbyszko's resentment and Sammartino's rage fueled this brutal feud, but the dominant emotion was utter sadness. No one can tell me Larry did not regret his evil deed, especially when Bruno—bloody shoulder and all—had his arm raised at Shea Stadium. Both men suffered the psychological trauma of a family torn apart.

## 1981

Georgia and Florida fans lived out their dreams this year, at least for what seemed to be fleeting moments. Tommy Rich defeating Harley Race for the NWA crown really seemed like a dream because it was over before most of "Wildfire's" fans even realized it had taken place. Rich pinned Race for the title in Augusta, Georgia, on April 27, and lost the belt back to Race four days later in Gainesville, Georgia. Rich didn't even have the chance to defend his newly won title in wrestling's southern Mecca, the Omni, nor did he have an opportunity to show off the 10 pounds of gold on *Georgia Championship Wrestling*. Most fans had to take Gordon Solie's word that the title change even happened. Dusty Rhodes' defeat of Race on June 21 at the Omni led to a more substantial reign, with every rulebreaker that hated Rhodes—The Funks, Roddy Piper, Ivan Koloff, Jimmy Snuka, and others—figuring the best way to get even with the "American Dream" was to take his precious belt. It turned out that Ric Flair was the triumphant one, beating Rhodes in Kansas City two months later. The NWA World championship roller-coaster was indeed a wild ride.



# From The Memories Of...

## The *PWI* Years: ||||| Stu Saks

### 1982

More than 20,000 fans at Madison Square Garden will never forget the moment. As WWF champion Bob Backlund laid supine on the mat, Jimmy Snuka climbed to the top turnbuckle. The fans had witnessed the "Superfly Leap" many times on television, but there was something awesome about seeing such a human feat performed live. Yet Snuka did not stop at the top turnbuckle. He kept climbing—approximately 10 more feet to the top of the steel cage. Fans held their breath. Snuka steadied himself on the precarious steel rim of the cage. Would he fall? Would he die? No, instead Snuka pulled himself erect, expanded his arms and hands in triumph, like a golden phoenix in defiance of mortality itself. Snuka leapt and soared through the air. Seconds seemed like minutes. For that moment, fans forgot Snuka had led a detestable existence in the WWF under the guidance of the evil Capt. Lou Albano for the past six months. They forgot that Backlund was supposed to be their hero. Fans would also soon forget that Backlund moved at the last instant as Snuka crashed and burned on the canvas. Nothing mattered—only the spectacle of "The Superfly."

### 1983

Tommy Rich's friends—Butch Reed, Paul Orndorff, Tom Prichard, and others—begged him to stop. Letters from concerned fans flooded the offices of Georgia Championship Wrestling. They pleaded with Rich to end his senseless campaign against Buzz Sawyer and resume his quest for Ric Flair's NWA title. Even the few friends that Sawyer had—Ivan Koloff and Paul Ellering among them—had implored him to forget about Rich. The images are graphic: Rich biting Sawyer's bloody nose, Sawyer ripping Rich's forehead open with his fingernails. Georgia promoters finally stepped in and announced the final match inside a cage capped with a metal roof. It was fitting that this inhumane conflict ended with both men confined like rabid animals. Rich won what was dubbed the "Last Battle Of Atlanta." Yet the unprecedented level of violence has assured the mutual destruction of both men. The physical and mental scars could never vanish.



Sawyer and Rich were never the same after this war

### 1984

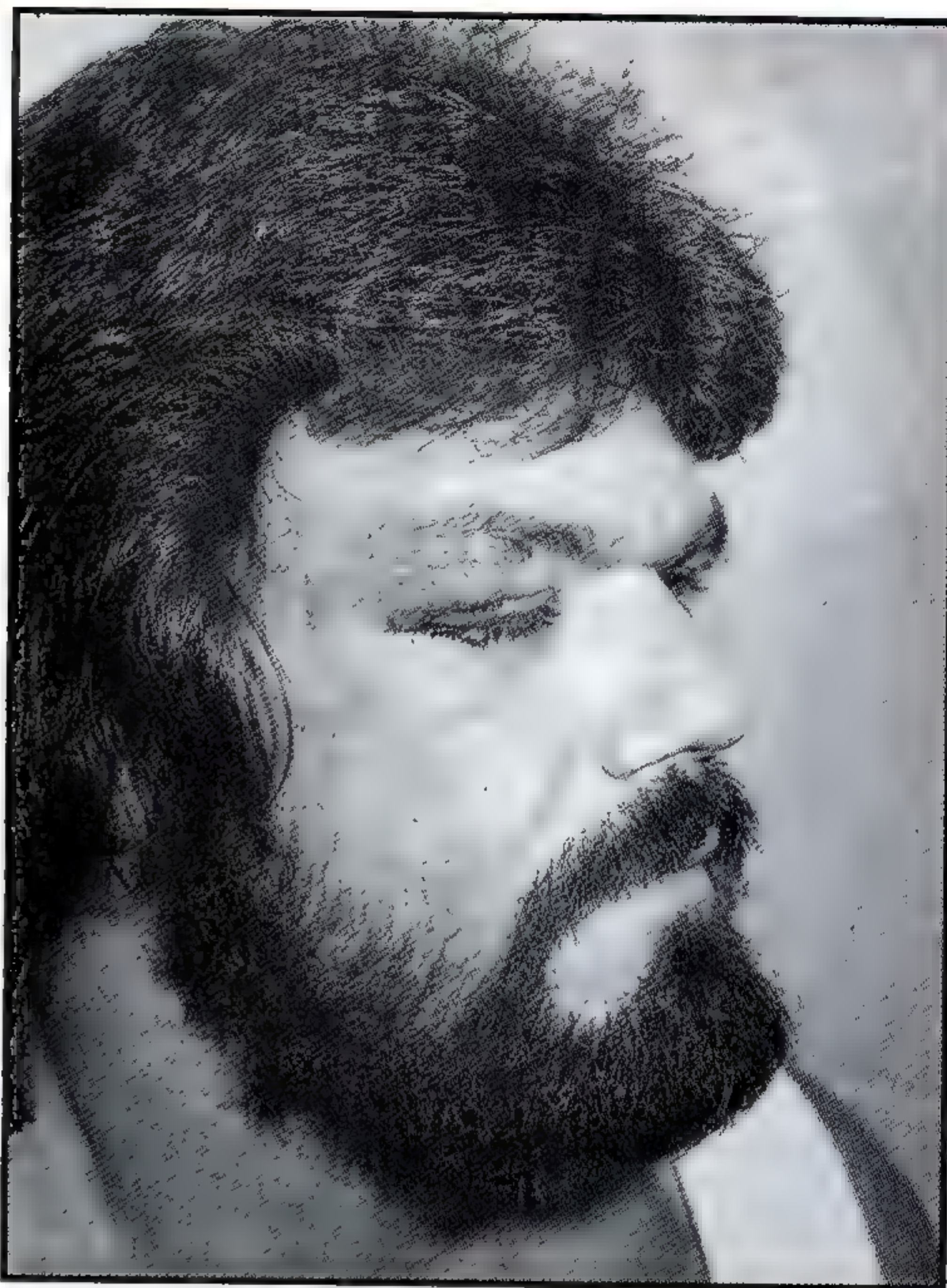
The incredible Hulk Hogan roared into the WWF amid Survivor's "Eye Of The Tiger" and thousands of screaming fans in December 1983. Within a month, Hogan had steamrolled The Iron Sheik for the WWF title. Hogan's popularity soared as he logged thousands of miles defending against his first round of challengers, including David Shultz, Paul Orndorff, Greg Valentine, Bob Orton Jr., Jesse Ventura, and Big John Studd. Hogan's name had started to appear on the marquees of Madison Square Garden, the Boston Garden, the Philadelphia Spectrum, and the Baltimore Civic Center, just like Bob Backlund, Bruno Sammartino, and other WWF champions before him. But there was something new afoot. Hogan's mustachioed image began appearing on T-shirts, lunchboxes, and foam beverage holders. Sure, the WWF championship had lost some dignity among such crass merchandising, but there was something exciting about all of it. And I was excited to see where "Hulkamania" was going.



# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of

## 1985

I learned the meaning of the word "courage" this year. They talk about how tough hockey players are when they take a puck to the face, go to the locker room to get stitched, and then come back to play later on. Well, I doubt any ever came back after taking 108 stitches. Steve "Dr. Death" Williams suffered a 108-stitch cut above and below his right eye after taking an elbow from Brad Armstrong—and then came back to wrestle that same night, teaming with Ted DiBiase against The Fantastics. Buy this man a pair of skates! ... It was my co-worker, Dan Shocket, though, that was my true inspiration. Riddled with cancer and sickened by the effects of chemotherapy, Dan refused to stop writing his *PWI* and *Inside Wrestling* columns practically till the day he died, on May 4, at just 35 years old. Dan couldn't beat cancer; ironically, Steve Williams did 20 years later.



A few (108!) stitches weren't going to keep Williams down

## 1986

"Big Jim" must have been smiling down on the Louisiana Superdome on April 19 when all eyes centered upon the Jim Crockett Sr. Memorial Cup. After all, Jim Sr. helped popularize tag team wrestling in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic by promoting duos such as George Becker and Johnny Weaver, Swede Hanson and Rip Hawk, and The Anderson Brothers. This year, Jim Crockett Jr. continued the tradition by assembling 52 of the greatest wrestlers in the world for this day-long tag team tourney. There were The Road Warriors, The Koloffs, The Rock 'n' Roll Express, and The Midnight Express from Crockett's World Championship Wrestling. The Fantastics and The Shepherders came from the Mid-South. The Fabulous Ones came in from Memphis. Rick Martel and Dino Bravo were set to fly in from Canada (although Bravo's appendix burst, making him unable to appear). Even Shohei Baba and Tiger Mask came all the way from Japan. But only one team could win the \$1-million prize. In the end, The Road Warriors defeated Ronnie Garvin and Magnum T.A. in the finals when Animal pinned Garvin. No doubt, "Precious" Paul Ellering enjoyed investing that sum!

## 1987

I was so looking forward to April 6 because that was the day my favorite, Sugar Ray Leonard, was returning to boxing to challenge "Marvelous" Marvin Hagler for the middleweight title. Leonard won and it was still one of the worst days of my life. It was on April 6 that a simmering feud between owner Stanley Weston and Publisher Peter King boiled over. Peter was not only my boss, but also a dear friend. I enjoyed being his second in command and wanted no part of his position. But try as I did to intervene and rectify the situation, it was not to be. I got sick that night, missed the fight, and went to work the next day to begin the rest of my life.



# The PWI Years: ||||| Stu Saks

## 1988

We were still reeling from Adrian Adonis' death in a car crash when we learned that Bruiser Brody had been fatally stabbed in the showers of Bayamon Stadium in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Like never before, it became stunningly clear how a wrestler's in-ring persona could differ from his demeanor and integrity outside the squared circle. Just as Adonis was hard-as-nails underneath an ill-conceived gay gimmick, Brody was not a barbaric madman in his personal life. Yes, he was a legendary performer, especially in Japan, but Frank Goodish was also a caring husband and father, a former teacher and writer, and a very intellectual person. That was what angered me the most as Associate Editor Dave Rosenbaum spent countless hours investigating the gritty details of Brody's murder. How could the life of such a talented man be snuffed out in one senseless, selfish act? Jose Gonzales, also known as Invader I, was charged with his murder, but like many Brody fans, I've never felt he was truly held accountable.

## 1989

Starting in 1984, we bore witness to the evolution of Nikita Koloff. Since Nikita was unveiled as a cyborg-like Soviet warrior—we saw him wrestle Ric Flair for the NWA World title and we saw him cry for his fallen rival Magnum T.A. Yet it wasn't until 1989 that we were given insight into the true depth of compassion and sensibility of the man. Nikita's wife, Mandy, had battled Hodgkin's disease for two years. Nikita and Mandy graciously allowed us into their home so we could document their struggle and inform our readers about her condition. Mandy's



Nikita & Mandy: A love affair cut down in its prime

effect on Nikita was profound. Inspired by her valiant fight, Nikita began donating his time to even more charitable causes, including anti-drug programs in high schools. I dare say that Mandy's story had a profound effect on our readers and me as well. Mandy died in her sleep on June 14 at Huntsville Hospital in Alabama. She was only 26 years old. Mandy and Nikita's marriage lasted less than a year, but the quality of their time together was immeasurable.

## 1990

Class. It's a word seldom applicable to athletes in any sport. Love him or hate him, Hulk Hogan proved on the afternoon of April 1 that he has class. It's hard to judge somebody's character when he is on top of the world, and that's where Hogan was for more than six years. Only in defeat is a man's soul revealed. The sight of Hulk Hogan saluting his conqueror, The Ultimate Warrior, as he was carted away from the SkyDome ring at WrestleMania VI will forever be etched in my mind. Hogan was understandably stunned immediately after losing. But as soon as he was able to think, he congratulated the new champ and left him alone to bask in the glory of his accomplishment. I became a Hulk Hogan fan on April 1.



# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of

## 1991

I hate to be negative around this time of year. But when thinking back on 1991, foremost in my mind are bodybags and coffins and Iraqi flags. The sport of wrestling took its lumps in '91, for sure. But then there was May 19—a day that will live forever in my mind and possibly the minds of every fan fortunate enough to have seen the superb battle pitting Lex Luger and Sting against Rick and Scott Steiner at SuperBrawl '91 in St. Petersburg, Florida. For one day, promoters broke the unwritten rule that forbids matches between fan favorites. For this match, nobody needed a rooting interest. It was enough to root for the very best action that four of the very best wrestlers could provide. In a year void of memorable moments, this match—the *PWI* Match of the Year—made me proud to be a wrestling journalist and fan.

## 1992

At the year's start, there was Paul E. Dangerously, the world at his feet, and The Dangerous Alliance, that blissful band of thugs, in virtual control of WCW. If there were a decision to be made, Paul E. made it quickly and correctly. If there were something blocking the path of Alliance dominance, he dealt with it appropriately. But soon, as always seems to be the case when bad people try to pool their talents, it all began to unravel, until finally—and this is my most memorable moment—Paul E. completely lost control on camera at Halloween Havoc and screamed just enough at Madusa to incite his former confidant to do her Rockettes impression on his head. Congratulations on your Manager of the Year award, Paul!

## 1993

I still have trouble believing this real-life soap opera actually played out before our very eyes: *Days Of Our Wives*, Flashback, 1990—Chris Adams trained a young Steve Austin at his wrestling school. Austin, the ingrate, turned against Adams in the cruelest of manners: He romanced Adams' ex-wife, Jeannie, who used a public forum to reveal how miserably Chris treated her. Chris' second wife, Toni, defended her man and ultimately wrestled a series of matches against Jeannie. Jump to 1993—Toni fell out of love with Chris



Toni Adams was bubbly, but certainly not clean!

and left him under the identity of Nanny Simpson. She later admitted her true identity and her contempt for her estranged husband, before joining the camp of Brian Christopher, who hated Adams more than anybody. Stay tuned, folks ...



# The PWI Years: ||||| Stu Saks

## 1994

My career as a wrestling journalist, beginning in 1979, directly coincided with Hulk Hogan's career as a professional wrestler. From his Mid-Southern roots as Terry Boulder to his WWF rulebreaker days with Fred Blassie to his AWA conversion to fan favorite and then back to WWF for the "Hulkamania" explosion, I marveled at his aura as he outgrew the limitations of a sport that previously enjoyed only a cult following. Hulk Hogan winning the WCW World championship combined athletic brilliance, human drama, and more than a touch of irony. If in the future I ever start to complain that wrestling is getting too predictable, please remind me about Hulk Hogan and the year 1994.

## 1995

Of all the bad press wrestling received in the early-to-mid-'90s, I don't think anything was as damaging as the embarrassment the sport suffered when, at WrestleMania XI, Bam Bam Bigelow, supposedly a star among stars, lost to Lawrence Taylor, a retired linebacker, with both the wrestling and mainstream sports worlds watching. On the positive side of the ledger, my most endearing memory came at a non-wrestling event, when Dan Severn outfought a field of martial arts tough guys to win the Ultimate Fighting Championship just five days after WrestleMania. "The Beast" recouped the credibility Bigelow squandered at 'Mania. Thank you from all of us, Dan.

## 1996

I understood the underhanded business tactics employed by both the WWF and WCW in their war for wrestling market share. I even got it when bat-wielding thugs attacked innocent wrestlers simply to make the point that no action was beneath them in their quest for dominance. What I couldn't deal with was the sight of a six-year-old kid swinging a rattan cane at his father, with his mother and another man looking on approvingly. With all the good that happened in wrestling that year, with the business thriving in a way it hadn't in more than five years, the Raven-Sandman-Tyler Fullington mess is my enduring memory. Maybe I am a pessimist.



Hopefully, Tyler's patched things up with Dad over the past 13 years



# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of

## 1997

My enduring memory of what was an incredibly eventful 1997 really doesn't hold much historical significance, but it solidified my view that wrestling was still the greatest sport in the world. On April 11 on a non-*Nitro*, non-pay-per-view card in Montreal, Jacques Rougeau cleanly pinned WCW World champion Hulk Hogan. No, the title was not on the line, but that didn't detract from feeling the pride Rougeau shared with the fans at the Molson Centre after scoring the greatest, most stunning victory in his 20-year career. Hogan was full of excuses, of course, but the truth was there wasn't a man or woman in this sport who ever won because of luck. You earn your wins, you earn your losses. And you can never understate the power of pure desire.

## 1998

The focus of fans, friends, and foes was on Buff Bagwell as he lay motionless for 15 minutes after jamming his head into Rick Steiner's side and damaging four vertebrae on April 22. I, of course, was frightened by the incident and terribly concerned for the fallen wrestler, but somehow, through all this, I got caught up in the plight of *WCW Thunder* announcer Tony Schiavone, who was, quite understandably, unprepared for the moment. He was obviously shaken by what was transpiring in the ring, yet with a director barking instructions through his headset, he had to quickly decide how much of the down time he should devote to the accident and how much he should speak about the suddenly irrelevant WCW wrestling scene. The professional manner in which he handled himself, masking just enough of his emotions to be a solid reporter, reminded me of the way ABC's Jim McKay covered the murder of the 11 Israeli wrestlers at the 1972 Olympics.

## 1999

The thought of speaking to Martha Hart, even five months after the tragic death of her husband, was something I felt awkward doing. Given her feelings about the business, I didn't know how she would react when I told her that Owen was the recipient of the *PWI* Editors' Award. Martha was sweet and gracious, however. She told me that Owen treasured the *PWI* Rookie of the Year plaque he received in 1987 and that this award, honoring Owen's memory, was something she would be proud to hang on the wall beside it. I only wish that we could have given him the award long after he retired from the sport.



Martha and Owen Hart thought they had their lives mapped out from Day One



# The PWI Years: ||||| Stu Saks

## 2000

At 9 p.m. Eastern on September 25, while most people I knew were settling in for the debut of *Raw* on TNN, I did the unthinkable. I forsook The King and J.R. and the returning Stone-Cold and continued watching *Nitro*. In my mind, how WCW would respond to the WWF on this night at that very moment would tell me if there was indeed hope that there could be a continuation of the Big War into the 21st century. Well, WCW put forth its best creative efforts and came up with a bikini contest to be judged by a bunch of weirdoes from Howard Stern's radio show. After 10 minutes, I turned off my set altogether. I was too depressed to watch anything.

## 2001

It's hard to feel sorry for a pompous billionaire, but on the night of March 26, my heart actually went out to Ted Turner. He wasn't responsible for WCW's loss to the WWF; his high-priced executives and overpaid wrestlers were. In fact, he bought the company in 1988 to keep it alive, and if he still had power within AOL Time Warner, it might still be alive. Turner was never embarrassed by his association with wrestling—that was until March 26.

As small a matter as it might seem to one of the world's richest men, being humiliated by Vince McMahon—on a TV station he created, no less—must have been very painful. Who knows? Maybe we haven't heard the last from Turner yet!

## 2002

I'm not sure if even Shawn Michaels knew what his body could give him before he faced Triple-H at SummerSlam. His doctors had long ago told him that he would have to retire or face the very real possibility that he could spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. The doctors knew all about the condition of his back, but they knew nothing of his heart. HBK went right after Triple-H in their Unsanctioned Street Fight, and dug deep to keep pace each time HHH seized the advantage. In the bout's closing sequence, Michaels reversed a Pedigree attempt into a jack-knife roll-up for the pin. Helmsley then attacked Michaels with his sledgehammer. Yes, Triple-H brutalized his former partner, but the only thing I remember is the gutsy performance by the iron-willed Michaels.



Vince McMahon did his best to humiliate Ted Turner

is the gutsy performance by the iron-willed Michaels.



# 30 AND COUNTING! A Celebration Of

## 2003

Zach Gowen was not the most liked wrestler in the WWE locker room. There were those who thought he was the beneficiary of preferential treatment and had an attitude problem. My response to those reports was, "Well, tough!" Fate had thrown tragedy in this kid's path most of his life. In 2003, he actually benefited from his handicap. Maybe he did get a little full of himself, but how many times in his life did he have the opportunity to puff out his chest a little? Zach had faced enough hardship in his life; he shouldn't have had to put up with a bunch of wrestlers that were jealous of his 15 minutes of fame.



Gowen made his co-workers jealous

## 2004

The Carters and Jarretts had every reason to be giddy over the results of TNA's first supercard pay-per-view, Victory Road. By all early accounts, the show drew a pay-per-view buy rate that was beyond any realistic expectations. My lasting memory of that card—and (unfortunately) my enduring memory for the year—was not what it should have been. The real stars of the show were A.J. Styles, Petey Williams, Jeff Hardy, and a bunch of men who worked their butts off in the X division Gauntlet Rumble that was ultimately won by Hector Garza. Still, I couldn't get the non-wrestling appearances of Randy Savage, Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, Roddy Piper, and Jimmy Snuka out of my head. There was a curiosity about the first TNA PPV supercard, and the presence of these men added to the intrigue. But if TNA was ever going to be a real competitor to WWE, it had to establish itself as the "cool" alternative. The NWO was a "cool" alternative in the 1990s. It's over. Nostalgia trips can be momentarily pleasurable, and the appearance of these men might have added to the bottom line for this one night, but if there really were to be a victory for TNA, they were going to have to take a different road.

## 2005

When Vince McMahon addressed his complete talent roster about the implementation of WWE's new drug-testing procedure, there wasn't a soul in the room who took him seriously, well, not at first anyway. But by the time Vince had explained that these tests would be administered by a third-party, and that they would not be of the "wink ... wink, nod ... nod" variety, the gathered wrestlers were stunned into silence. McMahon knew there would be a lot of questions about the new policy, but he had to ask four times before anyone would open their mouths. Perhaps the wrestlers feared that asking a question would imply that they were users and were hoping someone else in the room would ask what was doubtlessly on their minds. We could've discussed McMahon's motivations forever, but the bottom line was that he was doing the right thing for his wrestlers, and, ultimately for his company and the business. Furthermore, he made a point to have this meeting recorded for public consumption via [wwe.com](http://wwe.com). Potentially, this was a turning point for professional wrestling. I commend him.



# From The Memories Of ... The *PWI* Years: ||||| Stu Saks

## 2006

My enduring memory of 2006 had nothing to do with a particular match or wrestler. It wasn't about a death or a drug bust or a wrestler jumping to a former competitor. It was about the state of the business and the state of mind of those who felt their job was to run it down. I attended the so-called WWE press conference at Philadelphia's Wachovia Center six days before Survivor Series. I qualify the term "Press Conference" because there were only a handful of media members on hand. The better word for the event would be "pep rally." And was there ever pep! Hundreds of WWE fans gathered in one of the building's corridors at noon on a workday for the opportunity to get up-close-and-personal with WWE stars. Though some fans got into good-natured verbal jousts with the stars, everyone was orderly and appreciative of their time. So tell me this business was hurting then, and I'd have said, "Attend a WWE press conference and get a glimpse of those who know better."

## 2007

I'll start by saying that the rest of the *PWI* editors and writers had not lost their minds. Of course, each of them would have selected some aspect of the Chris Benoit tragedy as their enduring memory of 2007. I asked them not to. If all we took out of this 365-day period were sour thoughts on the actions of one man or the inactions of those who failed to grasp the fact that living for the next quarterly financials jeopardizes the very future of their business, then perhaps we should've just given up on being wrestling fans. If you read that issue from cover to cover, you'll realize there was a lot more to 2007 than the story that made headlines throughout the summer. So since I needed just one memory from that year, I thought about the WWE wrestlers that made their annual pilgrimage to Iraq to entertain the beleaguered troops. If that selfless act didn't help wash away the sour taste, you should've probably tried a sport that has no problems, like baseball, football, basketball, bicycle racing, track and field ...



Vince and WWE created a memory for U.S. troops in Iraq

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## 2008

After nearly 30 years in the wrestling business, I came to this conclusion after reading *Ring Of Hell*, by Matthew Randazzo V: For a reasonably intelligent man, I'm awfully naïve. Randazzo's revelations about the seedy inner-workings of professional wrestling came as a shock to most people, myself included. What I found most troubling was the descriptions of hideous physical and mental torture inflicted by wrestlers and trainers upon upstarts or those unable to defend themselves. I guess that's why I derived such pleasure over the report that Joey Styles had not only stood up to one of the sport's well-known bullies, JBL, but had actually cut open the man who stands nearly a foot taller. According to published reports, on the return trip from Iraq, an inebriated JBL poured drinks on the former ECW and Raw announcer (and *PWI* intern, by the way), and Joey retaliated when JBL went on to make derogatory comments about his family. Good for you, Joey, from an editor who can now feel good about the business again, and from every victim of abuse described in *Ring Of Hell*.





# Mid-Year Report

## Reliving the First Half of 2009

COMPILED BY **DAN MURPHY & FRANK INGIOSI**

**O**NE THING'S FOR sure: The first six months of 2009 have been very good for lunatics and legends.

The sadistic Randy Orton has been the most dominant force on the Raw brand, winning the Royal Rumble, the WWE title, and sending both Vince McMahon and Triple-H to the hospital.

The paranoid Edge came into No Way Out as WWE champion and walked out of the event as the World champion. Though he lost the belt to John Cena at WrestleMania, the "Rated R Superstar" won it back at Backlash, and sent Cena to the hospital in the process.

Heck, Necro Butcher even managed to get a shout-out at this year's Academy Awards!

Then, in the most surprising development of all, Mick Foley channeled his inner lunatic to win the TNA World title from Sting, and then to give TNA founder Jeff Jarrett a beating that sent him to the hospital.

In other words, if you don't have a mean streak, you'd dam well better have some good health insurance.

As for the legends, many veterans took pride in Mickey Rourke's performance as the down-on-his luck Randy "The Ram" Robinson, which many critics said portrayed veteran wrestlers with dignity. Sting dominated the TNA World title picture until he dropped the belt







to fellow legend Foley (which isn't to be confused with the Legends title introduced by Booker T). Jerry Lynn scored one for middle-aged and crazy guys everywhere with his victory over Nigel McGuinness for the Ring of Honor title. And Ricky Steamboat showed "The Dragon" can still breathe fire with some great showings against Chris Jericho.

And then there's the living legends of Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker who tore down the house at Reliant Stadium in Houston at WrestleMania in a front-runner for Match of the Year.

It has been a topsy-turvy 2009 thus far. The WWE title changed hands three times, the World title changed

hands three times, the Intercontinental and Women's titles were shipped to Smackdown, and the U.S. and Divas titles were moved to Raw. A man who has only wrestled a handful of matches all year holds the top title in TNA. A mystery man who might be—or might have been—Daniels, holds the X division title.

It's been a confusing, whirlwind half-year in the ring. The only thing that has been consistent is unpredictability. Now that the WWE brand rosters are set and the fallout from WrestleMania has largely passed, and the battle lines are more clearly drawn in TNA, the next six months should be just as exciting and unpredictable as the first.



▲ SEPTEMBER 2009 ▲



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 1 ] Triple-H Defends Title, Gains Vengeance at 'Mania

As much as Triple-H values the WWE championship, the stakes for his WrestleMania 25 clash against former Evolution teammate Randy Orton were much greater than a simple title bout.

Triple-H watched as Orton had punted his father-in-law in the head. He watched as Orton and Legacy savagely beat down his brother-in-law. And then he was forced to look on, helplessly, as Orton laid out his wife with RKO and a DDT as he was handcuffed to the ring ropes.

At WrestleMania 25, Triple-H got his opportunity to avenge Orton's repeated attacks on the McMahon family.

HHH was all business as he walked from the backstage area of Houston's Reliant Stadium toward the ring. He briefly paused to exchange a meaningful look with Vince and Shane McMahon, and then stormed the ring for the biggest grudge match of the night.

Triple-H's biggest challenge was not to simply defeat Orton; he also had to keep his emotions in check. Per a last-minute, pre-match decree from GM Vickie Guerrero, the WWE title would change hands if HHH was disqualified or counted out of the ring.

As the referee went over the rules Orton attacked like a viper, immediately felling Triple-H with an RKO. Instead of going for the cover and ending the main event of 'Mania in record time, Orton backed off and lined up his foe for a kick to the head. The champion eluded the running kick and caught Orton with a Pedigree. It was HHH's turn to inflict punishment.

The match repeatedly spilled to the floor. Triple-H went to hit Orton with a monitor from the announcers' table, but referee Scott Armstrong reminded him that would cause a DQ. HHH settled for a Pedigree on the table, which Orton countered into a back bodydrop, followed by a DDT on the floor. The champion avoided the countout, but got caught with another RKO. Orton grabbed the sledgehammer, but HHH wrested it away, smashed Orton, and connected with another Pedigree for the win.

Some fans felt the end of the match was anticlimactic, but for Triple-H, it was one of the most satisfying wins of his career.



Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 2 ] Dr. Phil Astin, Benoit's Doctor, Sentenced



Photo by George Napolitano

The investigation following the horrific tragedies involving the Benoit family in 2007 was widespread and thorough, but given the circumstances involved, the potential leads the authorities could investigate were sparse.

But, when the focus of the investigation turned to Benoit's mental state and whether there was some outside influence—chemical or otherwise—Georgia doctor Phil Astin emerged as a face of the investigation. Astin was charged in a 175-count federal criminal indictment and most notably with illegally distributing prescription drugs to 19 patients. In May, Astin was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison after pleading guilty, in January to all counts against him. Astin could have faced up to 20 years in prison, and fines of \$1-million, due to sentencing guidelines on more than 50 of the 175 charges placed on him.

The identities of Astin's patients were withheld from official court documents, which limited identification only to initials. However, the common belief amongst courtroom analysts was that the patient referred to as "C.B." in court documents was likely Chris Benoit. An additional shock came from the details of Astin's plea agreement in which he admitted that one of the 19 patients actually died from an overdose of the drug he illegally prescribed for her. Further, Astin admitted that he had, at times, filled prescriptions in the names of two patients without their knowledge.



### [ 3 ] Congress Releases Results Of Wrestling Probe

When the Congressional Committee on Oversight and Government Reform announced it was launching an investigation into steroid use in professional wrestling, the wrestling industry braced for the worst.

The wrestling world was still reeling from the Chris Benoit murders/suicide, which had attracted new attention to the long list of wrestlers who had died before the age of 40 within the past 25 years. While WWE had beaten federal steroid charges previously (in 1994) and the company had developed a comprehensive Wellness Policy to eliminate drug and steroid abuse, there was no telling what sort of dirty secrets a Congressional probe might uncover once it started turning over stones.

Even if the probe proved fruitless, the investigation still had the potential to be a public relations fiasco not only for WWE, but also for all wrestling promotions.

The Congressional committee conducted a series of interviews with the likes of Vince, Linda, and Stephanie McMahon, Dixie Carter, and David Black, the man who oversees the WWE Wellness Policy testing.

On January 2, the committee (overseen by chairman Henry A. Waxman) released its findings in a letter to John Walters, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

"The evidence obtained by the Oversight Committee indicates that illegal use of steroids and other drugs in professional wrestling is a serious problem that the wrestling organizations are not addressing," Waxman wrote. However, Waxman noted both WWE and TNA had made efforts to improve their steroid testing programs since the Congressional probe began, though he criticized the lack of independence and transparency with those programs.

Essentially, the investigation resulted in a minor slap on the wrist to the industry. There were no televised hearings or media circus, and the results of the investigations attracted relatively little mainstream notice, particularly as the controversy over steroids in baseball heated up.

Transcripts of the interviews even showed Vince McMahon (accompanied by WWE attorney Jerry McDevitt) lapsing into his "Mr. McMahon" character, lashing out at questioners.



Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 4 ] Orton Wins Royal Rumble, Title Shot



Photo by George Napolitano

Randy Orton was the eighth man into the ring at the 2009 Royal Rumble, and he stood alone when the match was over.

Orton's win was assisted by his flunkies, Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr. Legacy acted as Orton's personal security team, protecting the third-generation competitor and helping Orton stave off elimination.

The Rumble came down to Orton, Rhodes, DiBiase, and Triple-H. The odds were clearly against Triple-H, but "The Game" wasn't intimidated. Triple-H focused his attack on Rhodes first and quickly eliminated the son of "The American Dream." DiBiase then swooped in and grappled with Triple-H. As DiBiase and HHH neared the ropes, Orton charged and dumped both men simultaneously to earn his first Royal Rumble victory.

As a result of his win, Orton earned a match for the WWE championship at WrestleMania. At the time the Rumble ended, the WWE champion was Edge, Orton's former "Rated RKO" partner, but by the time WrestleMania rolled around, Triple-H would be holding the gold, ensuring that the long-running feud between Orton and HHH would continue at 'Mania.

There were several other memorable moments at the 2009 Royal Rumble. "Mr. Monday Night" Rob Van Dam made a surprise appearance, eliciting a huge crowd reaction. Triple-H eliminated six men, the most of the night. Triple-H also remained in the ring for the longest period of time, entering the ring at the number seven spot and surviving more than 51 minutes. Conversely, Santino Marella survived barely one second as he was eliminated the moment he stepped into the ring.

In another Rumble highlight, Rey Mysterio Jr. avoided elimination by walking on the backs of two other wrestlers who had been tossed to the floor. Since his feet never touched the ground, Rey was allowed to get back into the ring and continue.



## [ 7 ] Phoenix Selected As Site Of WrestleMania 26

The city of Phoenix may not know what the future holds for its hockey franchise (which BlackBerry co-CEO Jim Balsillie wants to move to Ontario), but Phoenix residents can take solace in one thing: WrestleMania is coming to town on March 28, 2010.

At a press conference on February 24, WWE officially confirmed that WrestleMania 26 will take place at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale. The arena can seat 63,400 fans for football games, and can accommodate up to 73,719 fans for other activities. With a venue of that size, the event promises to be one of the biggest events in 'Mania history.

Glendale Mayor Elaine Scruggs joined WWE Chairman Vince McMahon, Arizona Cardinals coach Ken Whisenhunt, and several WWE superstars to make the official announcement, which had been heavily rumored for several months, especially after Phoenix Coyotes coach and co-owner Wayne Gretzky was photographed in a WrestleMania sweatshirt weeks before the announcement.

"You know it's going to be good, just like the Super Bowl," Whisenhunt said, noting that fans buy tickets for the event long before the matchups are announced.

"WrestleMania has become part of the cultural fabric," said Chris Jericho. McMahon promised the event will be "mind-blowing."

In addition to the pay-per-view spectacular, the city also will host a Fan Axxess event, Hall of Fame Ceremony, WrestleManiArt exhibition, a "Rock The Block" party, and will host *Monday Night Raw* the night after the event.

Mayor Scruggs predicted the event would generate \$35- to \$50-million in revenue for the local economy. The city was selected by WWE after a year-long bid process.



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## [ 8 ] Matt Hardy Turns On Brother, Costs Jeff WWE Title

It was obvious there were forces aligning against Jeff Hardy, but who would have thought his very own brother was the one behind all his misfortune?

Jeff is no stranger to bad luck. His early WWE career was derailed by erratic behavior. He was tossed out of TNA for missing PPV events. He missed last year's WrestleMania because he was suspended for violating WWE's Wellness Policy. He even lost his home and his beloved dog in a tragic fire in 2008.

But by late-2008, it seemed like Jeff had put his misfortunes behind him. He had gotten himself back into contention for the WWE title. And at Armageddon 2008, he beat Edge and Triple-H in a three-way match to win the WWE championship.

As 2009 opened, Matt and Jeff were champions of the Smackdown and ECW brands, respectively. But Jeff's misfortunes were continuing. He had been attacked in a hotel by a mystery assailant in November, and had been run off the road by an erratic driver, nearly causing a serious accident. Then, when he went to confront Edge as being the man behind the attacks during a "Cutting Edge" segment on *Smackdown*, Hardy's pyrotechnics misfired, blasting him with concussive force and a shower of sparks. Fortunately, Jeff was not seriously injured in the accident.

Jeff defended his championship against Edge in a no-DQ match at the Royal Rumble. After an impressive 18-minute bout, Hardy seemed ready to put Edge away after nailing him with a Twist of Fate and a swanton. Vickie Guerrero pulled the referee from the ring to prevent the three-count, but Matt Hardy pushed Vickie back into the ring and handed his brother a chair. The brothers lined Edge up for a Con-chair-to, when Matt suddenly wheeled and smashed Jeff with the chair. Edge pinned the helpless Hardy to end his Cinderella story as a jealous Matt smirked.



Photo by George Napolitano



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 9 ] Undertaker Keeps Streak Alive Against Michaels ---->-->-->

Every year as the winds begin to change and winter slowly creeps toward spring, discussions arise over whether this will be the year that the amazing WrestleMania winning streak of The Undertaker will finally fall. And, every year for nearly two decades, the "Dead Man" ends that debate with a resounding "No."

At WrestleMania 25, The Undertaker was slated to face perhaps the most daunting opponent in his 17 matches on the card: Shawn Michaels. Michaels had earned the title "Mr. WrestleMania" for possessing an innate ability throughout his career to rise to the occasion at WWE's trademark event and compete at a level that only furthered his status as a living legend. Although Michaels' record at 'Mania was nowhere near as stellar as his opponent's, the "Heartbreak Kid" was supremely confident of his chances heading into WrestleMania, held in both men's home state of Texas.

What transpired was not only the best match of the event, but also a surefire Match of the Year candidate in which both men showcased precisely what it was that made them stars. The near-falls were plentiful and nearly every second of the contest was packed with drama and action. In the end, it was an amazing feat of strength when 'Taker caught Michaels mid-air and converted a moonsault into a patented Tombstone Piledriver that would be the difference. The Undertaker moved to 17-0 at WrestleMania and Michaels' legacy, despite the loss, remained intact.

### [ 10 ] ROH Debuts On HDNet

For fans fortunate enough to have access to Mark Cuban's HDNet channel through their local cable provider there is now a popular alternative to your average televised wrestling week.

In January, HDNet entered into what was described as a "long-term deal" with Ring of Honor to air a weekly broadcast of *Ring Of Honor Wrestling* each Saturday night, with replays to follow. The first episode aired in late-March and featured ROH stalwart Dave Prizak and veteran sports commentator Mick Hogewood calling the action from ringside.

ROH played up the angles just enough so as to not take away from the wrestling. The personalities of the wrestlers were put on display in the debut episode with the likes of Jerry Lynn coming off as the grizzled veteran

with something left to prove and Jimmy Jacobs as the conceited punk. Later, the promotion would announce a multi-appearance deal with Ric Flair, who would take part in the HDNet broadcasts as the promotion's "Ambassador."

But, as successful as the early debut of ROH was, in late-May it was announced that Time Warner Cable would cease carrying HDNet as of month's end, taking out a very large portion of the viewing audience in the process.



Photo by Joe Zanolle







## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 11 ] Randy Orton Declares War On The McMahon Family

At the Royal Rumble, Randy Orton earned a title match for WrestleMania, but six days earlier, the "Legend Killer" put his WWE career in jeopardy with a shocking attack on WWE Chairman Vince McMahon.

During a heated altercation on *Raw*, Orton lost his cool and slapped McMahon in the face. Then, without thinking about the potential consequences of his actions, Orton lined up the prone McMahon and viciously kicked the WWE boss in the side of the head.

The blow knocked McMahon unconscious, and even Orton himself seemed genuinely stunned at what he had done. Orton later claimed that his outburst was the result of a psychological condition known as Intermittent Explosive Disorder (a real disease), and that he should not be held accountable for attacking McMahon.

Shane McMahon wasn't about to accept Orton's excuses, and an enraged Shane O'Mac demanded his pound of flesh. Orton and Legacy battled with Shane throughout February, but it turned out Orton was merely setting the trap for his real prey—the WWE champion, Triple-H.

Following Orton's attacks on the McMahons, Triple-H finally acknowledged his five-year marriage to Stephanie McMahon, which he called wrestling's worst-kept secret. HHH warned Orton to back off from his family, but Orton was just getting started.

After handcuffing HHH to the ring ropes, Orton savagely attacked Stephanie, as her husband was forced to look on helplessly. After hitting Steph with a RKO and DDT, he kissed her on the lips, as HHH raged impotently.

It was psychological warfare at its most primal and it set the stage for a feud that would see its way through to the main event of WrestleMania 25.



Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 12 ] Christian Makes Surprising ECW Debut

In January, the Internet was buzzing with rumors that Christian Cage was the mystery man responsible for a series of attacks on then-WWE champion Jeff Hardy, including attacking him in a hotel, running his car off the road, and tampering with his pyrotechnics.

At times during the Royal Rumble, fans could be heard calling for Christian (who was last seen in TNA being destroyed by the Main Event Mafia, allegedly for considering a jump to WWE). Christian never appeared at the Rumble, and Matt Hardy ultimately claimed responsibility for being brother Jeff's antagonist.

It wasn't until the February 17 edition of *ECW On Sci-Fi* when Christian finally arrived in WWE. "Captain Charisma" returned in grand style, interrupting a promo by then ECW champion Jack Swagger and declaring that he wanted the ECW title.

The two-time former NWA champion got his title match against Swagger one week later, but the "All-American American" proved to be up to the test. In a tremendous back-and-forth bout, Swagger earned a clean victory over Christian, taking some of the shine away from his surprise return.

The loss put Christian—who had been rumored to be part of one of WWE's top storylines—in the position of having to prove himself all over again. Many observers interpreted Christian's low-key return as a none-too-subtle payback for having jumped from WWE to TNA in 2005.



Photo by Matt Roberts



## [ 13 ] Jericho Challenges Rourke For Match At 'Mania

Mickey Rourke was getting so much love from the critics, who could blame him for getting a little overconfident?

The star of *The Wrestler* was being interviewed on the red carpet at the Screen Actors Guild Awards when he insinuated he might show up at WrestleMania. He even went so far as to single out Chris Jericho, firing the opening salvo in what would become one of the more intriguing wrestling "feuds" of the year.

Jericho confronted Rourke on *Larry King Live*, reminding the actor that "there is a difference between playing a wrestler in a movie and being one in real life."

"I think Mickey kind of talked out of line," Jericho said. "I think Mickey was given some bad advice in saying my name on the red carpet. If you get your wish, Mr. Rourke, you will learn things you never learned in playing a wrestler in a movie."

When King pressed Rourke on whether he would accept Jericho's challenge, Rourke side-stepped the issue, claiming he was "taking the high road."

Jericho didn't let the issue go that easily. He continuously ran down Rourke, as well as the "pathetic old-timers" Rourke represented with his portrayal of Randy "The Ram" Robinson. Jericho's verbal—and physical—attacks on WWE legends culminated in a WrestleMania match pitting Y2J against Roddy Piper, Jimmy Snuka, and Ricky Steamboat.

Jericho won that bout as Rourke watched from ringside. But instead of accepting his victory gracefully, Jericho browbeat Rourke until the actor stepped into the ring. Jericho and Rourke—a former pro boxer—circled and Rourke unleashed a quick left hand that sent Jericho to the canvas in a heap.

The one-on-one match never materialized ... and Jericho may be lucky it didn't.



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## [ 14 ] Andrew "Test" Martin Found Dead At 33

In another all-too-common case of a professional wrestler's life being cut tragically short, Andrew "Test" Martin passed away in March from what was eventually ruled an accidental overdose of the painkiller Oxycodone.

Martin was only four days shy of turning 34 when he was found unresponsive by medical personnel in his Tampa, Florida, apartment. Published reports stated that a neighbor of Martin's notified authorities about seeing a man matching the former Intercontinental champion's description lying motionless for several hours through the window of his apartment. Upon arrival, medical personnel declared Martin dead at the scene.

Speculation as to the cause of Martin's death ran rampant until the Hillsborough County medical examiner's official confirmation of the accidental overdose was released to the public more than three weeks later.

Having bounced around promotions since his 2004 release from WWE, Martin appeared to find some stability in late-2007. Prior to his death, Martin most recently worked in TNA as "The Punisher," teaming with the likes of Abyss and Sting. Unfortunately, Martin's time in Orlando proved to be brief, leading to an announcement of his retirement from the ring in 2008. With only one remaining obligation to fulfill—an independent tour of Ireland—Martin's days inside the squared circle appeared all but finished.

Aside from the occasional blog entry—and a relationship with WWE's Kelly Kelly—Martin stayed largely out of the spotlight until his untimely death.



Photo by Gary Dimin/Winning Image



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 15 ] Jerry Lynn Wins ROH Title

The first half of 2009 was a strange and exhilarating time for Jerry Lynn. With all the natural comparisons and whisper campaigns comparing him at this advanced stage of his career to the fictional Randy "The Ram" Robinson of *The Wrestler* fame, Lynn was once again back in the forefront of mainstream wrestling conversation. Still, just being mentioned in the same breath as the highly decorated film had to take a backseat to the feat the 45-year-old accomplished in April.

After bouncing around the independent circuits following his release from TNA in 2007, Lynn became a full-time member of Ring of Honor in late-2008. Competing against the likes of Austin Aries and Roderick Strong, Lynn showed that he could still hold his own in the ring and show some of the younger wrestlers a thing or two in the process. Bringing an old-school style toughness to ROH, it wasn't long before Lynn set his sights on a higher prize that he had yet to attain in his career: the ROH championship.

During WrestleMania weekend, ROH held its Supercard of Honor IV at the George R. Brown Convention Center in the heart of Houston, Texas. Expecting to draw from the massive fan base in town to catch WWE's premier event, ROH pitted Lynn against then-ROH champion Nigel McGuinness with the gold on the line. In arguably the biggest match of his career, Lynn captured the ROH title in front of a capacity crowd after nailing McGuinness with a cradle piledriver. For once, the spotlight was simply on Jerry Lynn for being Jerry Lynn.



Photo by Scott Finkelstein

### [ 16 ] All Three WWE Brand Titles Change Hands At Backlash ---->---->---->

For the first time since WWE established ECW as a third brand, all three major singles championships changed hands on one pay-per-view event: Backlash.

The title changes started right away as Christian connected with a Killswitch after a charging Jack Swagger ran headfirst into an exposed turnbuckle in the opening bout.

The next championship to change hands was the WWE title, which was up for grabs in a six-man tag match pitting champion Triple-H, Batista, and Shane McMahon against Randy Orton, Ted DiBiase Jr., and Cody Rhodes. Per stipulation, the winner of the fall would win the championship. Orton and Legacy took advantage of the mistrust and dissension among their opponents, successfully isolating one adversary at a time. The fan favorites rallied once Batista entered the fray, but Orton managed to catch HHH with the RKO. "The Legend Killer" then lined up the champion and connected with a vicious running kick to the head to knock Triple-H unconscious. Orton made the cover and collected his fourth world championship.

In the final match of the card, World champion John Cena put his belt on the line against his old nemesis, Edge, in a last-man-standing match. Cena seemed to have the match under control until The Big Show intervened. Show chokeslammed Cena off the entrance ramp and through a spotlight. Cena was unable to answer the referee's 10-count, giving Edge his ninth world title.

Both Triple-H and Cena had to be stretchered out of the building after their respective matches.



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## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 17 ] WWE Launches *Superstars*

With more than five hours of original weekly cable television programming, WWE added another piece to its growing media empire with the debut of *Superstars* on WGN America in April.

Not to be confused with the long-running WWF/WWE offering of the mid-1980s through early-2000s, the revitalized *Superstars* now features original matches spanning all three of the company's brands. Top wrestlers compete in pay-per-view quality matches that both further existing storylines and can stand alone enough so as to provide some level of continuity when aired together. As of late-spring, the announcing duties were left to the individual teams that called matches for the specific brands and each match was taped during the regularly scheduled broadcast of the individual brand's weekly program and aired as part of the next episode of *Superstars*.

While over-saturation had to have been a concern for WWE, the initial ratings did not indicate that the company had lost its core audience with the sixth hour of original weekly programming. The debut episode of *Superstars* pulled in a 1.2 rating, which was on par with, and at times higher than, that of both ECW on the SciFi Channel and TNA's *Impact* on SpikeTV.

WWE also made episodes of the broadcast available on its website, which, according to the company's press release, received more than six million hits in relation to *Superstars* since the program's debut episode.

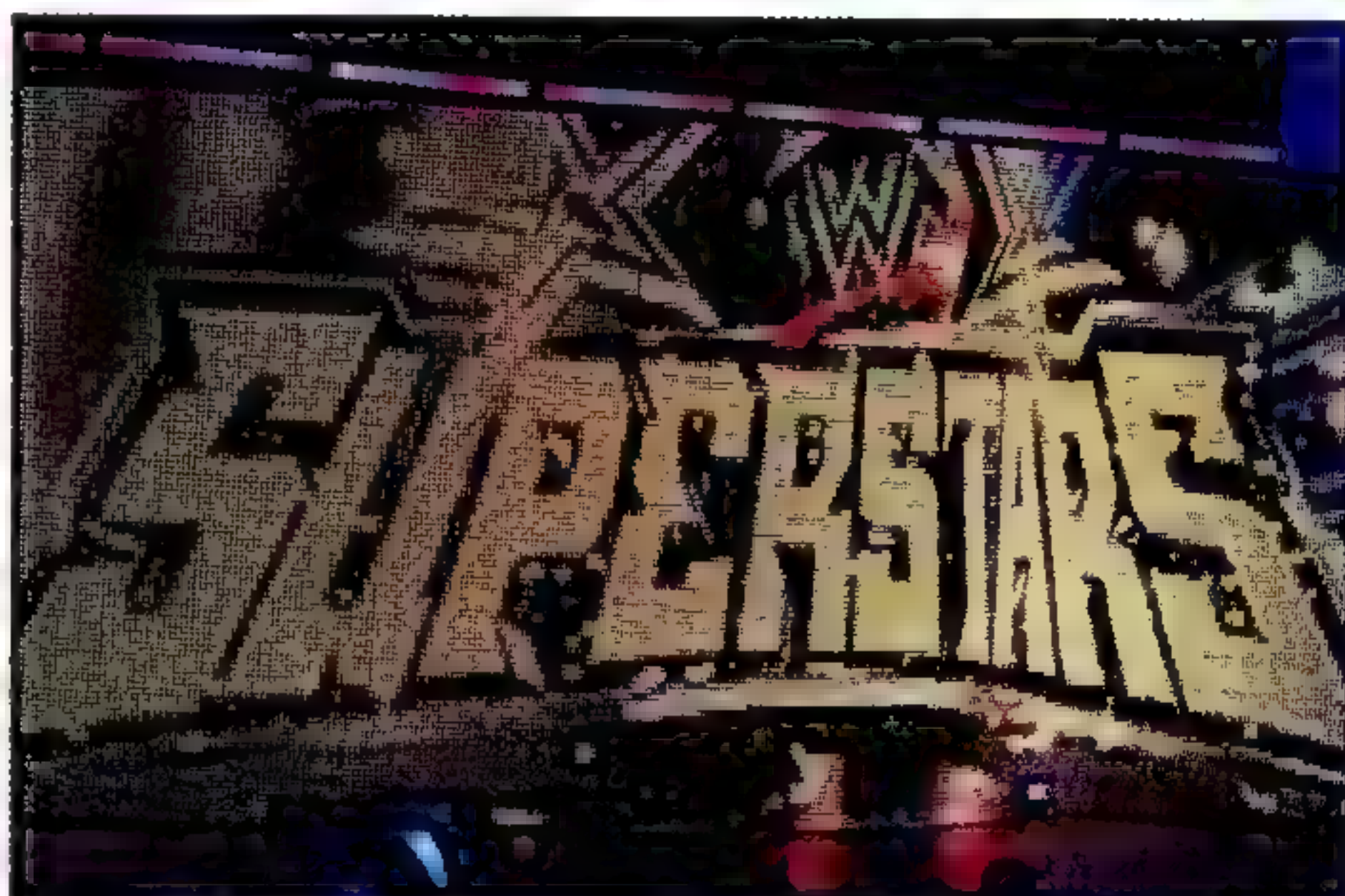


Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 18 ] Yoshihiro Takayama Beats The Great Muta For The All-Japan Triple Crown Title

The man who does a little bit of everything as far as in-ring combat is concerned can now add one of the most prestigious championships in all of Japanese wrestling to his credit. In March, Yoshihiro Takayama became the AJPW Triple Crown champion by defeating the legendary Great Muta at Pro-Wrestling Love in Ryogoku Vol. 7.

The massive brawler from Tokyo has enjoyed a career filled with successes at various levels and in numerous sports, which has made him a very popular figure in Japan. Squaring off against one of the most famous and technically sound Japanese wrestlers of all-time in Muta showed the level of respect Takayama had garnered as a wrestler. Plus, having already held nearly every major championship in AJPW, New Japan, and Pro Wrestling NOAH, Takayama's choice of targeting the Triple Crown seemed like a logical career step for the 42-year-old.

In classic Takayama fashion, the championship match was less about his lack of technical proficiency and more centered on his ability to withstand punishment and pick his spots. Even Muta, at times, abandoned his surgical precision in favor of an all-out brawl. With both men battered and bloodied, it would be Takayama who had just enough left in him to capture the victory. After successfully preventing Muta's trademark mist spray, Takayama landed his Everest Suplex finisher into a pinfall, leaving AJPW with a new Triple Crown champion and The Great Muta bewildered at the turn of events.



Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

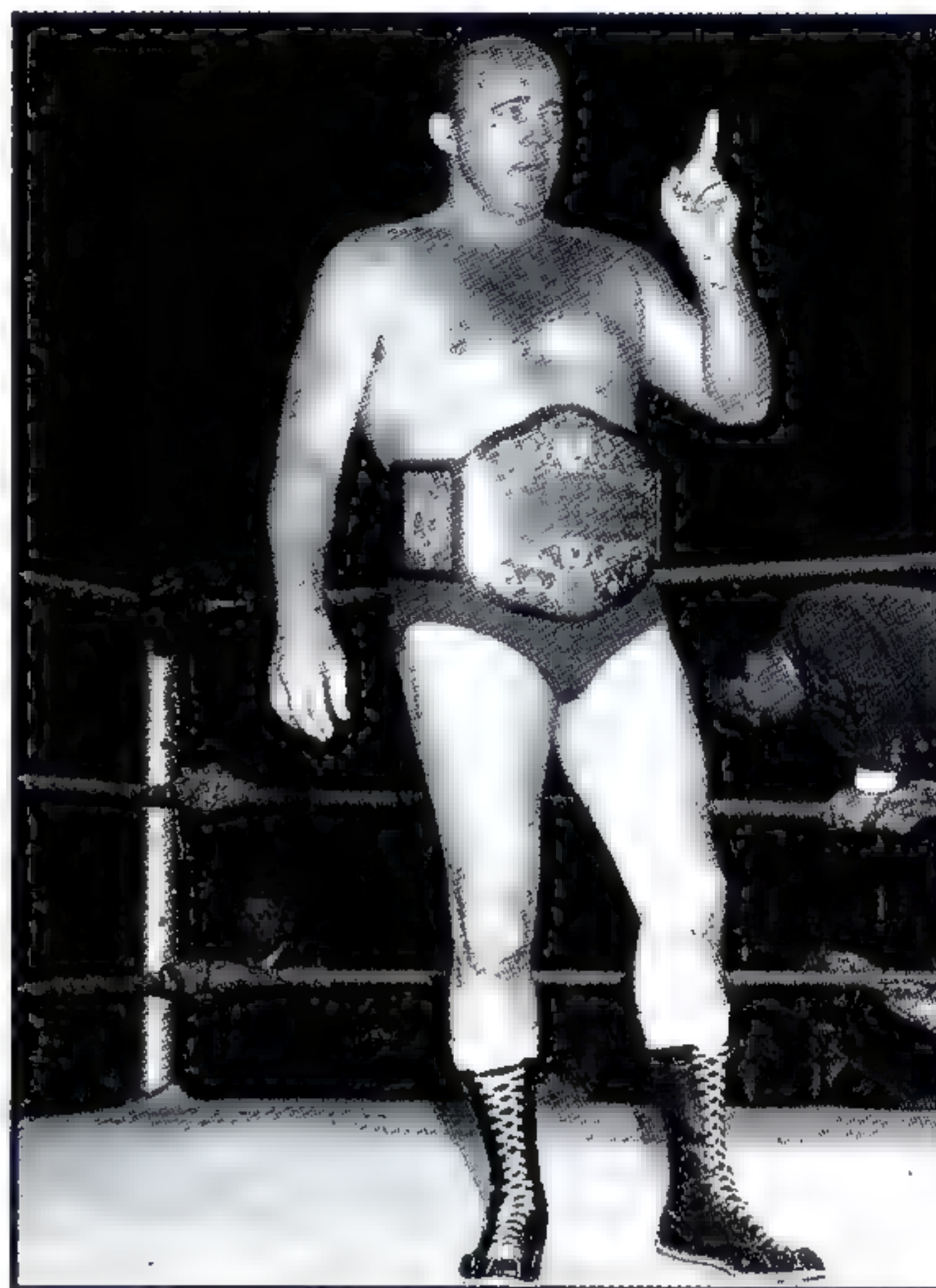


## [ 19 ] Verne Gagne Causes Death Of Elderly Man In Nursing Home

Living with an Alzheimer's disease diagnosis in a Minneapolis-area nursing facility, Hall of Famer Verne Gagne was involved in an altercation with a fellow resident that ended in tragedy. In January, the 82-year-old former AWA World champion became involved in an argument with 97-year-old Helmut Gutmann who was also reported to be suffering from the effects of Alzheimer's.

While the details of the police report were initially sketchy, all parties stipulated that the result ended with Gagne knocking Gutmann to the ground in some manner. Initial reports—and those relayed by Gutmann's family—were that Gagne picked up Helmut and threw him to the ground, although the final police report would conclude that the fall was likely brought about by a shove. As a result, Gutmann was admitted to the hospital with what doctors determined to be a broken hip. Nineteen days later, Gutmann died from complications related to the injury.

News of the event quickly spread throughout the wrestling community and speculation began as to whether Gagne would be subject to criminal charges. After a month-long investigation by the Hennepin County Prosecutor's Office, Gutmann's death—which was ruled a homicide—would not be prosecuted as it was determined that Gagne lacked the requisite mental capacity to form the intent necessary to be charged criminally. The former wrestler's advanced Alzheimer's symptoms led to a level of dementia that actually caused Gagne to forget the incident ever took place.



## [ 20 ] Jericho Involved In Parking Lot Fracas

Chris Jericho is very good at making fans hate his guts. On February 7, that particular talent nearly provoked a riot in a parking lot in British Columbia, Canada.

Jericho was leaving the Save-On Foods Memorial Centre in Victoria, British Columbia, after having competed against John Cena and Randy Orton in a three-way main event. As he was attempting to drive away from the arena, a group of fans surrounded his car while he was at a stop sign. Jericho exited the vehicle and exchanged some unpleasant words with the fans and the situation quickly began to escalate. A 20-year-old female fan allegedly spit in Jericho's face, and Jericho responded by pushing her. That shove set off a mini-riot, with fans lunging at Jericho and crowding his vehicle, as Jericho demanded that arena security disperse the crowd and allow him to leave.

The incident was recorded on cell phone cameras and quickly found its way to TMZ.com and YouTube. Eventually, security was able to subdue the crowd long enough for Jericho to drive off unharmed. Two fans were arrested but were later released without being charged.

Jericho, who took a bit of a beating in the court of public opinion, contended that arena security was being lax in allowing the situation to develop. The incident touched off a debate about wrestlers' rights to defend themselves when confronted by potentially hostile fans.



Photo by George Napolitano



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 21 ] Angle, Sting Tear Down The House In Empty Arena Match

Everything about it seemed counterintuitive. Two estranged partners—TNA's biggest names—decided to settle their differences in a no-holds-barred battle on free television in an empty arena. The match did little to resolve the bad blood between Main Event Mafia brothers Sting and Kurt Angle, but the unique bout helped TNA earn its highest *Impact* rating ever.

On the February 19 edition of *Impact*, Angle demanded a one-on-one match against Sting. However, Angle claimed that it was a private matter and that the fans in the Impact Zone didn't deserve to see it.

TNA executive shareholder Mick Foley (no stranger to empty arena matches) sanctioned the match. The fans were ushered out of the Impact Zone and allowed to watch the bout on closed-circuit TV outside.

Sting and Angle started inside the ring and wasted no time battling through the empty seating area. At one point, Sting tossed Angle over the side of the bleachers, sending him 19 feet below to the unpadded floor.

Sting managed to wrest a chair from Angle and was on the verge of smashing him over the head when Kevin Nash and the rest of the MEM interceded, calling for cooler heads to prevail. Sting paused, allowing Angle just enough time to spit in his face.

The match deepened the growing rift between Angle and Sting, and threatened the unity of the MEM, but more importantly for TNA, it helped *Impact* earn a 1.3 rating.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

### [ 22 ] Michaels Wins His Freedom From JBL

If there's one person who really deserves some Sweet Chin Music, it would have to be Shawn Michaels' financial adviser.

Michaels has been one of the most successful (and marketable) stars in WWE history, but he claimed that the recession had cost him almost all of his savings. John Bradshaw Layfield offered to put Michaels on his payroll, and Michaels reluctantly agreed in order to feed his family.

In essence, JBL made Michaels his indentured servant and tried to use Michaels to help him win the World title from John Cena. At the Royal Rumble, a very conflicted Michaels very nearly did just that ... but instead he laid out *both* Cena and JBL and walked away. Michaels was willing to sell his services, but he wasn't willing to sell his soul.

Layfield challenged Michaels to an All Or Nothing match at No Way Out. If Michaels won, he would be released from JBL's service contract. If Michaels won, then JBL would win the rights to Michaels' image and likeness, including all of his future merchandising money.

With Michaels' wife, Rebecca, watching from ringside, Michaels squared-off against JBL in the most important match of his career. Layfield repeatedly tried to goad Michaels into a DQ loss, but Michaels didn't take the bait. JBL came very close to beating Michaels with a Clothesline From Hell, but in the end, Michaels sealed the deal with some Sweet Chin Music to become a free man once again.

And apparently Michaels' portfolio has rallied, since his financial woes apparently vanished overnight.



Photo by George Napolitano



## [ 23 ] Edge, Triple-H Take Titles In Elimination Chamber

You have to hand it to Edge. He lost his WWE title in the opening match of No Way Out, and wound up winning the WWE World title in the main event.

No Way Out 2009 featured two Elimination Chamber bouts. By their very nature, the Elimination Chamber creates unique, unpredictable contests, but no one could have predicted what would unfold on February 15 in Seattle.

The first chamber bout pitted champion Edge against Triple-H, The Undertaker, The Big Show, Jeff Hardy, and Vladimir Kozlov. In a major surprise, the champion was the first man eliminated, guaranteeing that the winner of the match would become the new WWE champion. Edge was pinned by Matt Hardy barely three minutes into the match, and Triple-H went on to win the match—and the title—following a Pedigree on The Undertaker.

An enraged Edge sulked backstage, then attacked Kofi Kingston, who had been scheduled to compete in the Elimination Chamber bout for the World title later in the show. With Kingston injured, Smackdown GM Vickie Guerrero ruled that Edge could take Kingston's place in the match. Edge stepped into the ring against champion John Cena, Kane, Rey Mysterio Jr., Chris Jericho, and Mike Knox. Kane and Knox were the first two men eliminated, followed by Cena after a Code Breaker from Jericho, a 619 from Mysterio, and a spear from Edge.

Mysterio eliminated Jericho, then took a vicious spear from Edge, allowing WWE's "Ultimate Opportunist" to win the match and end the PPV with a different world championship than he started with.



Photo by George Napolitano

## [ 24 ] Samoa Joe Unleashes His Nation Of Violence

At Bound for Glory 2008, Samoa Joe lost the TNA World title to Sting. Not only did that match cost Joe the championship, but it set his career on a downward spiral that dropped him out of title contention altogether.

As the Main Event Mafia took over TNA, Joe fell into a slump. In December, he was attacked by the Mafia and vanished from TNA for several weeks. On the January 29 edition of *Impact*, Joe finally appeared in a pre-taped vignette, sporting a close-cropped haircut and tribal war paint on his face. Joe promised to unleash his "Nation Of Violence" on the Mafia ... and on TNA.

The new-look Joe debuted at Destination X against Scott Steiner and was disqualified for excessive use of violence. Joe began stalking Steiner and threatening him with a machete, even dragging him off-camera and ostensibly disfiguring Steiner (Steiner briefly wore a mask to hide the "injuries").

When Joe was disqualified in a match against Sheik Abdul Bashir, it became clear that Joe's rage wasn't just limited to the members of the MEM. Joe rebuked his ally A.J. Styles and said he no longer had any friends. His loner attitude caused friction with his partners on Team Jarrett at Lockdown.

There's no doubt that Joe's "Nation Of Violence" has given him a spark, but running up a string of disqualifications isn't getting him any closer to the TNA World title. He's dangerous, but he's a far way away from the World title he covets.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 25 ] Primo & Carlito Unify Tag Titles At WM25

Unless you were one of the 72,000-plus live in attendance or simply waited for the DVD release in May, you may have never known that the WWE and World tag team championships were unified by the Colon brothers at WrestleMania. Sure, you may have heard something about it in the weeks leading up to the event, but those tuning in to catch a glimpse at this piece of history were left scratching their heads.

Prior to 'Mania, then-WWE tag team champs Primo and Carlito Colon were involved in a bitter feud with then-World tag team titlists John Morrison and The Miz. Both pairs of men—in addition to defending their respective titles—fought over the affection of the Bella sisters who, eventually, split and chose sides. Still, the feud persisted and it became clear that a showdown at WrestleMania 25 in Houston would be the logical culmination for their rivalry.

Although it was officially slated to be a part of the largest pay-per-view on the WWE calendar for quite a while, the decision was ultimately made to remove the title-unification match from the main card and hold it as an untelevised dark match that would be made available as part of the eventual DVD release. Also, the contest was converted into a Lumberjack match.

In the end, the Colons emerged victorious, unifying both WWE tag team championships for the first time in the company's history.



Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 26 ] Manabu Nakanishi Beats Hiroshi Tanahashi For IWGP Title

Manabu Nakanishi was once touted as a future champion, but that was way back in 1999 after he defeated Keiji Muto to win the 1991 G1 Climax tournament. Nakanishi was New Japan Pro Wrestling's "Next Big Thing" for the past 10 years, but never managed to win the prestigious IWGP championship.

At 41 years old, Nakanishi (who wrestled in WCW in the late-1990s as Kuarasawa) was considered a long shot to ever win New Japan's top prize. Nakanishi had come maddeningly close over the years, but could never get his hands on the brass ring. Most experts felt his time had come and gone, and labeled him a career underachiever.

Conversely, the reigning IWGP champion, Hiroshi Tanahashi, had been on a hot streak, collecting wins over Muto, Kurt Angle, and Shinsuke Nakamura. Tanahashi was at the top of his game. Nakanishi had a long history of choking in championship matches. On paper, Tanahashi had an easy night ahead of him when he faced Nakanishi on May 6.

But wrestling matches aren't won on paper. Nakanishi wrestled one of the best matches of his career against Tanahashi. The underdog surprised the champion with a German suplex at the 21:39 mark. Three seconds later, Nakanishi had earned his first IWGP heavy-weight title, finally realizing his superstar potential.

Nakanishi earned a standing ovation from an emotional crowd at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo, as the fans (many with tears in their eyes) saluted a man they thought would retire without ever having won that elusive championship. Nakanishi's win was the most unexpected and emotional title match in Japan thus far in 2009.



Photo by Koich Yosifizawa



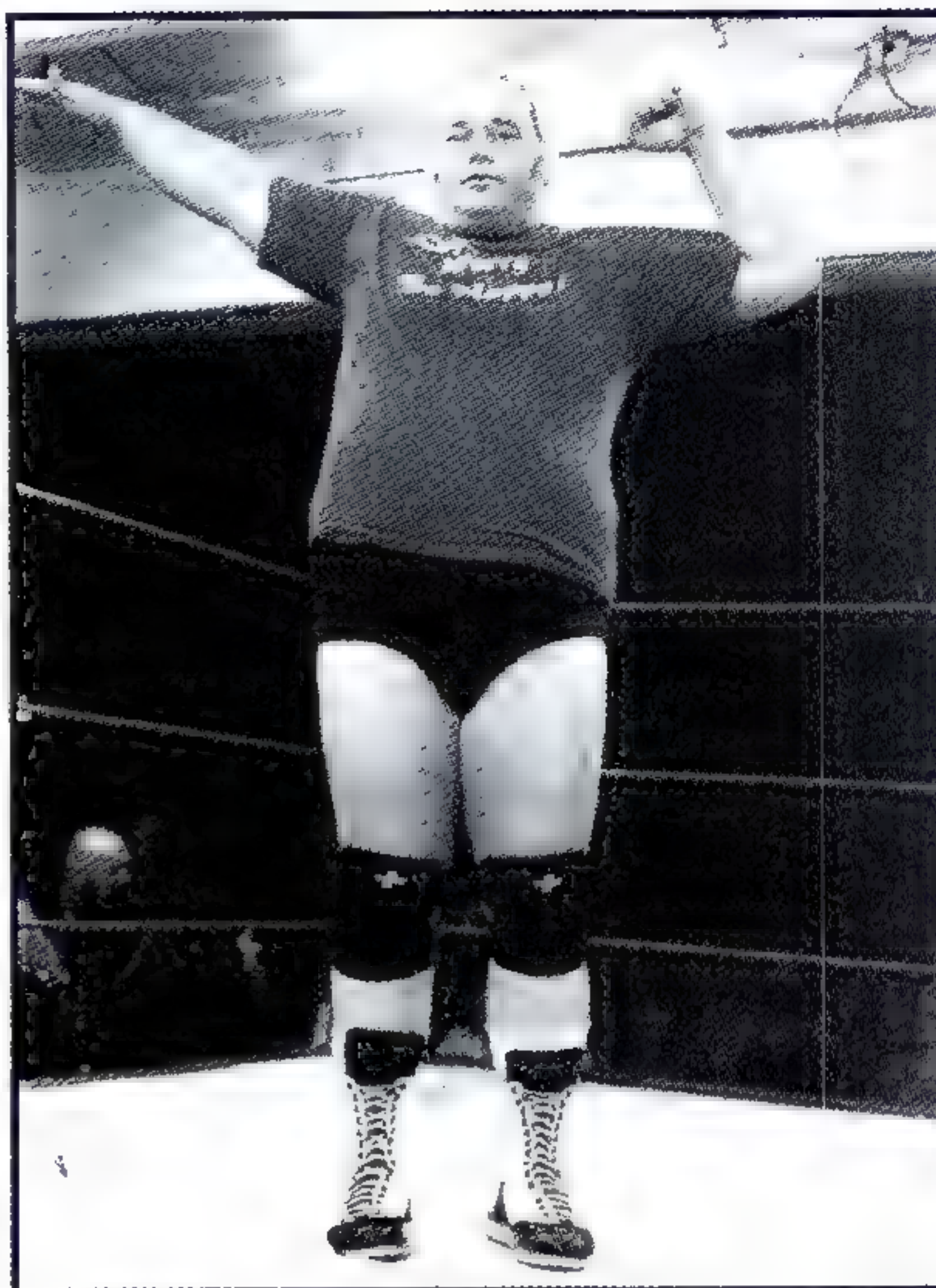
## [ 27 ] "Playboy" Buddy Rose Dies

A man who had the distinction of competing in the first match at the first WrestleMania passed away at the age of 56, sitting in his favorite chair in his home in Vancouver, Washington.

Born Paul Pershman, he trained for the ring in Verne Gagne's AWA training school and made his pro debut in 1973. He created the "Playboy" Buddy Rose persona and became a star in promoter Don Owen's Pacific Northwest territory. Charismatic and deceptively agile, Rose feuded with the likes of Roddy Piper and Jimmy Snuka. He competed in the WWF in the early-1980s and donned a mask to become The Executioner at WrestleMania at Madison Square Garden, where he lost the opening match to Tito Santana.

In 1986, he and Doug Somers (managed by Sherri Martel) won the AWA World tag title from Scott Hall and Curt Hennig, eventually losing them to Shawn Michaels and Marty Jannetty. He had a final run in the WWF as a mid-card performer in 1990 and is remembered for his "Blowaway Diet" powder parody infomercial. His peers respected him for his superior promos, his ring generalship, and his incredible ability to rile a crowd.

Rose had struggled with his weight for several years, and turned that problem into a gimmick where he would correct the ring announcer and claim to be 217 pounds as his real weight crept above 300 pounds. He died on April 28 after a lengthy battle with diabetes.



## [ 28 ] Reid Flair Arrested On Heroin Charges

In early-spring, Reid Flair—the youngest son of "Nature Boy" Ric Flair—was arrested on two separate occasions in North Carolina leaving his immediate future as a wrestler, as well as his freedom, in doubt.

In March, Flair was arrested and charged with driving while impaired in Mecklenberg County, North Carolina. The 21-year-old grappler was released after posting the required \$1,000 bail and lived without incident for more than a month-and-a-half. Continuing to wrestle for NWA Charlotte during the time period, Flair actually enjoyed his highest level of success as a professional wrestler.

Awarded the NWA Mid-Atlantic heritage championship by commissioner J.D. Costello, Flair settled back into focusing on wrestling and developing what seemed poised to be a promising career in the ring. But, another run-in with the law in late-April left Flair's career in limbo.

Flair was involved in a one-car accident outside of Charlotte that resulted in a routine police search of the damaged vehicle. During the search, police discovered black tar heroin that was alleged to belong to Flair. Flair was remanded into custody and charged with felony drug possession, as well as driving while impaired, driving with a revoked license, and possession of drug paraphernalia, all misdemeanors.

After posting the \$15,000 bail require for release, Flair was awaiting further proceedings at press time.



Photo by Matt Roberts



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 29 ] Jack Swagger Wins ECW Title

Last year at this time, Jake Hager was building a strong buzz as a breakout prospect in Florida Championship Wrestling, WWE's developmental territory. On January 13, Hager—now known as Jack Swagger—won his first championship in WWE and became the top dog on WWE's extreme brand.

Swagger came into his title match riding an undefeated streak in WWE, and many observers considered the reigning ECW champion, Matt Hardy, to be the underdog in this match, which aired on *ECW On Sci-Fi*.

Swagger started off quickly with an amateur-style takedown, but Hardy responded with a quick suplex that sent Swagger reeling. Hardy took the advantage with a bulldog, and then attempted to dive onto Swagger on the floor, but Swagger caught Hardy and slammed him to the concrete. Swagger then went to work on Hardy's left shoulder and neck, wearing down the champion. Swagger connected with big superplex for a near fall. He attempted a second superplex, but Hardy countered with a power bomb off the ropes. As Swagger flailed to avoid the move, he ripped off the protective covering on the turnbuckle, exposing the metal buckle underneath.

Swagger deftly avoided a Twist of Fate attempt and landed a belly-to-belly suplex, followed by an armbreaker.

Hardy rallied and went to the top rope for a moonsault, but Swagger pulled him from the ropes, causing Hardy's head to bounce off the exposed turnbuckle. Swagger connected with his gut-wrench power bomb to earn the win and become the new ECW champion.



Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 30 ] Jeff Jarrett Returns To Active Competition

Although never one to draw the cheers of the fans throughout his career, Jeff Jarrett was welcomed back into the TNA fold with open arms by the very customers he strove to alienate for years as the head of Planet Jarrett. Having gone through the very public death of his wife following a long illness, the meaning of Jarrett's full-time return to TNA at Genesis in January was not lost on the fans.

Following months of goading, broken up by the occasional appearance, Jarrett was forced into a return match with Kurt Angle due to a stipulation he himself set in place at the promotion's Final Resolution pay-per-view in December 2008. Having defeated Rhino, Angle received a bout with his nemesis. In the end, Jarrett may not have quite been ready to return to action full-time—suffering a loss in a no-DQ match. Still, the fire had been rekindled and Jarrett quickly assimilated himself into every facet of *Impact*.

Naturally, a Jarrett-led TNA would not seem normal without controversy, and it didn't take long for the self-proclaimed "King Of The Mountain" to create a stir. Seemingly aligned against Angle and the Main Event Mafia, Jarrett spent most of the spring apologizing for allowing the MEM to run wild over TNA. Still, in the early part of the year, Jarrett played an integral role in restoring some semblance of balance to TNA and allowing both the MEM and Frontline groups to coexist.

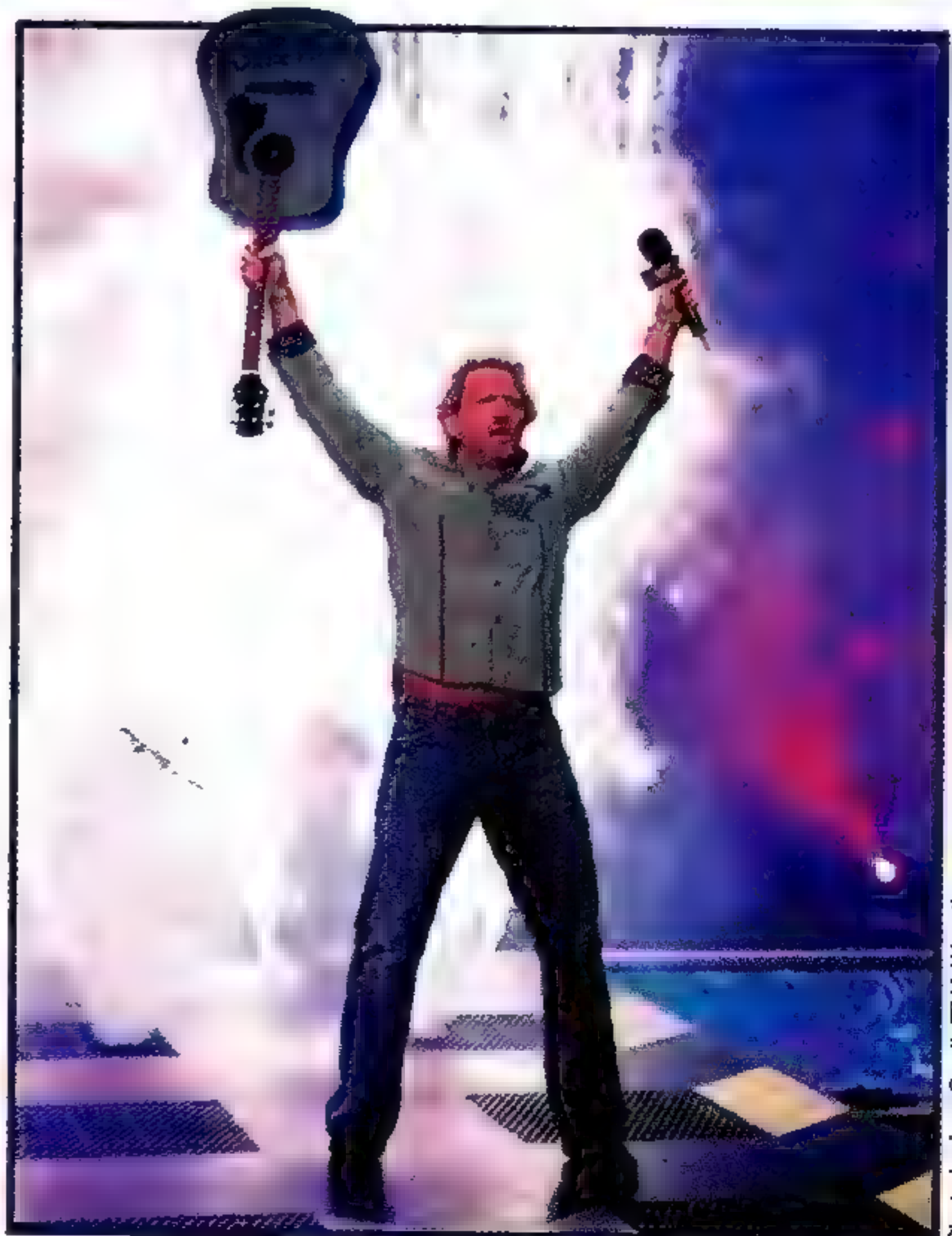


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



## [ 31 ] John Cena Wins The World Title At WrestleMania 25

In front of a sellout crowd at Reliant Stadium on April 5, John Cena once again captured the World title by defeating then-champion Edge and The Big Show in a three-way match that was part of the evening's co-main event.

Easily considered an underdog heading into the event, Cena warded off the advances of both competitors to become a five-time world champion. Perhaps more intriguing than the actual match itself—although it was impressive—were the events leading up to 'Mania that allowed the eventual victor to even be a part of the match at all.

In the weeks preceding the Smackdown main event at 'Mania, then-GM Vickie Guerrero announced that her husband, Edge, would be taking on The Big Show in a singles match with the World title on the line in Houston. This was the plan until just prior to the actual contract signing. Raw's Cena was shockingly added to the match despite not being a part of the Friday night brand.

It was later revealed that the reason Guerrero suddenly caved to Cena was because the former World champion not only knew of an illicit affair between the GM and her husband's 'Mania opponent, but he also had video proof, much to the chagrin of fans in the viewing audience. Cena would go on to make the most of the situation, pinning The Big Show to capture the gold and leaving a very displeased trio in his wake.

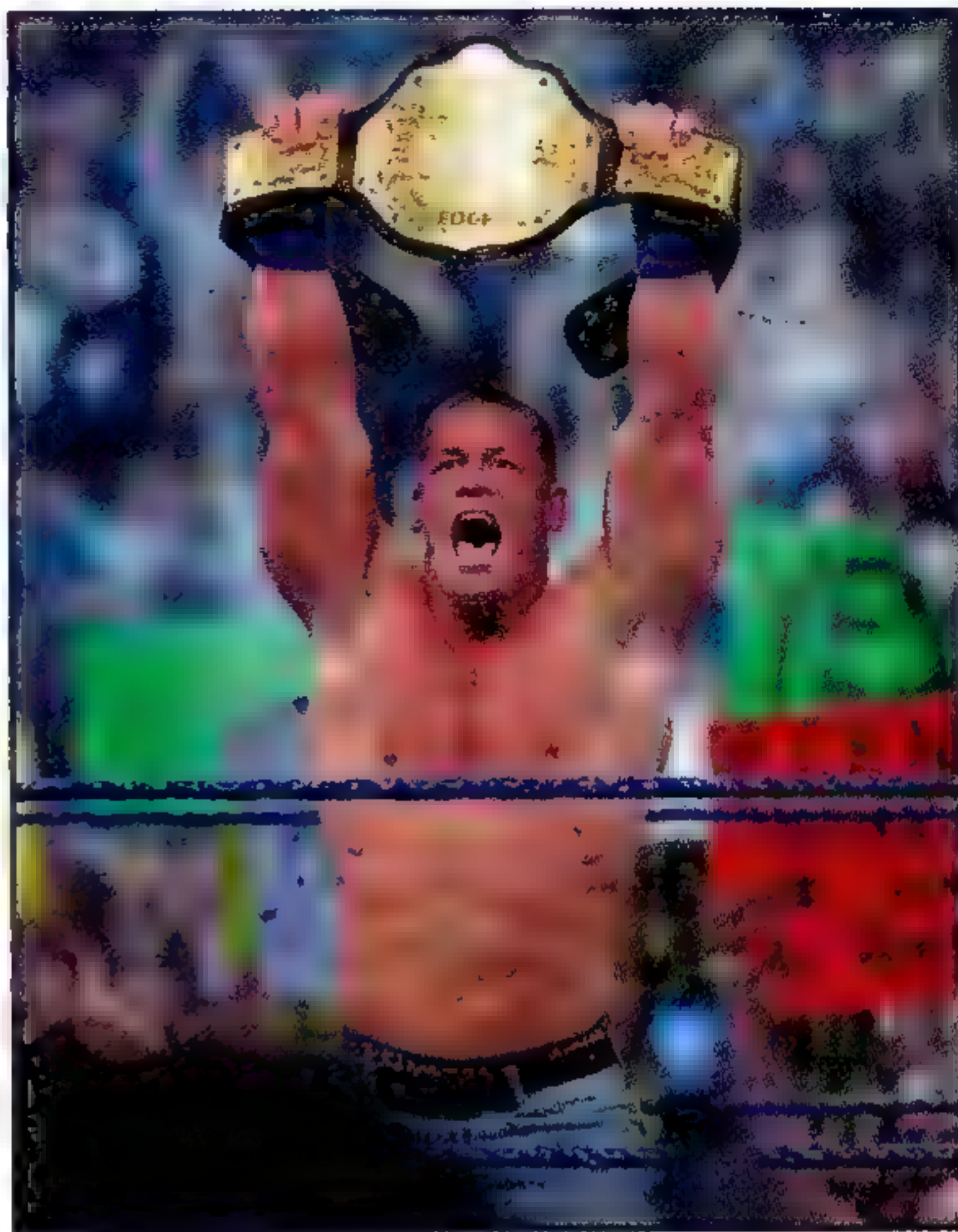


Photo by George Napolitano

## [ 32 ] Mysterious Suicide Wins X Division Title

The hype for Suicide started back in the summer of 2008, as the mysterious message "Who is Suicide?" flashed onscreen during episodes of *Impact*. As it turned out, Suicide was a video game character, the protagonist of *TNA Impact: The Video Game*, which was released in fall 2008.

At Final Resolution 2008, life imitated art as a real-life Suicide debuted in TNA, attacking the Motor City Machine Guns. The man in the skull mask would rappel into the ring and vanish as the lights went out following every match.

It didn't take long for the fans to begin to assume it was Christopher Daniels under the hood. The fact that Suicide arrived on the scene shortly after Curry Man lost the "Feast Or Fired" match seemed to add substance to that theory, especially since Suicide used some of Daniels' trademark takedowns and moves.

At Destination X, the mystery man won the X division championship by winning an Ultimate X bout over the Motor City Machine Guns, Consequences Creed, and Jay Lethal. Suicide won the match with a daredevil dive from the scaffolding, a dive Daniels himself had once performed in an Ultimate X match.

Both the Machine Guns and Creed and Lethal went on to confront Daniels about having a secret identity. Daniels neither confirmed nor denied the charge, but on the May 14 edition of *Impact*, "The Fallen Angel" surprised everyone. As the four X division wrestlers tried to remove Suicide's mask, Daniels stormed the ring and ran them off, proving once and for all that Daniels is not Suicide ... we think.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 33 ] Team 3-D Simultaneously Holds TNA, IWGP Tag Titles

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, holds a very special place in the history of Team 3-D, and on April 19 at TNA's Lockdown pay-per-view the duo found one more reason to return the affection to the "City Of Brotherly Love."

Already the reigning IWGP tag team champions by virtue of a January victory over Togi Makabe and Toru Yano at Wrestle Kingdom III, Team 3-D looked to settle the score with longtime TNA rivals Beer Money Inc. at Lockdown. In front of a heavily partisan crowd, the fan favorites looked to capture TNA World tag gold for the second time since the promotion's separation from the NWA. With history on their side, the 21-time world tag team champs added yet another piece of hardware to their trophy case. The match—a Philly Street Fight—carried the extra stipulation that were 3-D to lose, they would not only miss out on the TNA World tag team straps, but they would also be forced to relinquish the IWGP tag title to Beer Money Inc.

Unfettered by the restrictions of the six sides of steel, the teams battled throughout the arena taking multiple high-impact risks all designed to steal the victory. The four men battered each other through the crowd, returning the ring periodically to utilize the steel walls in hopes of scoring a pinfall.

But, as expected, 3-D would not accept defeat on their surrogate home turf. Just when Beer Money appeared to be in control, Team 3-D drove Robert Roode through a fortuitously placed table with a 3-D to simultaneously retain and capture championship gold.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

### [ 34 ] Jim Wilson Dies At 67

In the early-1970s, Jim Wilson was one of pro wrestling's rising stars. According to him at least, influential NWA promoter Jim Barnett went so far as to say he had the potential to become a world champion.

Just a few short years later, Wilson would become a pariah, blackballed from the business after attempting to create a wrestlers' union and challenging the so-called monopoly of the National Wrestling Alliance.

In 1965, Wilson was named to the NFL All-Rookie Team, alongside Gale Sayers and Dick Butkus. A lineman with both the San Francisco 49ers and the Atlanta Falcons, Wilson began wrestling in the off-seasons to earn supplemental income. With his impressive athletic credentials, "Big" Jim seemed poised to become a star, but his wrestling career derailed when he allegedly turned down a sexual advance from Barnett.

Wilson claimed he was blacklisted from wrestling, and went public in his battle to draw attention to the political blacklisting, sexism, and racism of the wrestling industry. He appeared in a *20/20* expose on pro wrestling in 1984, spoke out against the wrestling establishment on the *Morton Downey Jr. Show*, and published (with Weldon T. Johnson) *Chokehold: Pro Wrestling's Real Mayhem Outside The Ring* in 2003. Portrayed by some as a bitter ex-wrestler with an axe to grind, Wilson was hailed by many others as a passionate advocate for wrestlers against a manipulative political system. *Chokehold* stands as one of the most informative and fascinating exposes on the wrestling industry ever written.

On February 2, Wilson succumbed to cancer at the age of 67.



Photo by Mike Lano



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 35 ] C.M. Punk Becomes A Two-Time Money In The Bank Winner

Falling just short of his 2008 goal of winning the World, tag, and Intercontinental titles in one calendar year did not deter C.M. Punk from making history in early-2009. At WrestleMania 25 in Houston, Texas, Punk became the only man in the five-year history of the Money in the Bank ladder match to enjoy a repeat victory.

The first to qualify from the three WWE brands, Punk had the ability to assess his fellow competitors for more than a month prior to the match. Warding off the advances of his seven direct competitors, Punk captured his second consecutive guaranteed world championship match contract in dramatic fashion. Battling the massive Kane atop the ladder, Punk was able to maintain his balance long enough to dispatch the "Big Red Machine" and snatch the briefcase.

In the weeks that followed, Punk experienced multiple near-misses in his attempt to cash in his world title shot. Following the WWE draft that saw him move from Raw to Smackdown, Punk once again attempted to pry the World championship away from Edge as he had following his MITB victory at WrestleMania 24. Making his intentions known on a weekly basis, Punk began his pursuit of Edge—and the World title—immediately upon becoming a member of Smackdown. However, a series of attacks by Umaga prevented Punk from officially cashing in his contract and getting a shot at the gold.



Photo by George Napolitano

### [ 36 ] Lashley To TNA At Lockdown

Upon being released from his WWE contract in February 2008, it seemed like an all-but-foregone conclusion that Bobby Lashley would make his way down Interstate 95 toward Orlando and set up shop in the six-sided ring. But, when the former ECW champion chose instead to pursue a career in mixed martial arts, fans of his wrestling career began to resign themselves to his early departure from the sport.

So it's easy to imagine the surprise and excitement Lashley's fans felt when the man made a wholly unexpected appearance at TNA's Lockdown pay-per-view in Philadelphia in April. Complete with his very own entrance video and music, Lashley appeared at the top of the entrance ramp following the Lethal Lockdown match. Cutting an imposing figure under the lights of the Liacouras Center, Lashley did not speak a single word in his TNA debut, but rather pointed down toward ringside, to both the pleasure of just-beaten Kurt Angle, and the dismay of the victorious Jeff Jarrett.

Following Lockdown, Lashley appeared only briefly with TNA on the following week's episode of *Impact*. Details on his affiliation with the promotion were sketchy at first, however reports surfaced in the weeks that followed intimating that Lashley would continue his MMA career *and* compete in TNA. By mid-year, Lashley had yet to make his presence felt in TNA, but his MMA career got off to a very hot 3-0 start, which prompted some fans to wonder if they were witnessing the first, true bridge between wrestling and MMA.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



## [ 37 ] Ric Flair Appears In ROH

Only a year after working his final match as an active competitor, Ric Flair's name began appearing in various wrestling discussions as someone potentially interested in getting back into the industry. Staying true to his word throughout most of the preceding year, Flair avoided temptation and stayed away from the ring. But, the allure of the industry became too much for the 16-time former world champion and Flair signed a deal with indy darling Ring of Honor.

Initially, Flair was contracted to work for WWE in a representative capacity, making appearances on behalf of the company and being one of its more recognizable public faces. But, when that deal fell apart in mid-2008, Flair was released from his WWE contract and free to make appearances as he pleased. It wasn't until January 2009 that Ring of Honor signed a television deal with the HDNet channel to air a series of taped events that the potential of a Flair-ROH association took shape.

Given the title of Ambassador—and a role similar to that of General Manager—Flair began making appearances starting with ROH's maiden broadcast on HDNet. With the capacity to make matches and intervene on behalf of the promotion, Flair was an immediate hit with both fans and the wrestlers.

Slated to make appearances for ROH throughout the summer, Flair later pulled double-duty by returning to WWE on a semi-regular basis following his involvement in WrestleMania weekend.



Photo by George Tahinos

## [ 38 ] WWE Draft Reshuffles The Deck, Splits Tag Teams

In April, WWE went through its second rite of spring aside the annual draft. Once again, every WWE contracted employee was in play and anyone could be moved at a moment's notice.

As had been done in the prior two drafts, the 2009 version was driven by stipulated matches in which the winning competitor's brand would be awarded a pre-determined amount of draft picks. Picks were made by a randomized computer simulation and not by any brand-specific personnel, leading to variety in the choices and familiar faces moving to unfamiliar places.

For the first time since the draft became a tri-branded event, Raw ended up with the most televised picks of the three WWE entities, and the Monday night group did not waste its spot, loading up on top talent such as Triple-H and The Big Show. Smackdown garnered the second-most picks with former Raw members C.M. Punk, Chris Jericho, and Rey Mysterio Jr. being the centerpieces of its acquisitions. ECW secured only one draft pick, taking Vladimir Kozlov from Smackdown.

Once again, the televised draft was followed by a supplemental selection round, which was covered by [wwe.com](http://wwe.com). An additional 23 wrestlers were moved in the supplemental draft with Ken Kennedy (to Raw from Smackdown) and Carlito and Primo Colon, the Unified tag team champions (from Smackdown to Raw) being the most notable of transactions. The Miz and John Morrison were split, and ended their partnership with a post-match fight the following week on *Raw*.



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## Mid-Year Report

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### [ 39 ] A.J. Styles Redefines "Legend" With Win Over Booker T

In what had become an unfortunate trend throughout his career, A.J. Styles was once again underestimated by an opponent who felt the three-time former NWA champion would not be an opponent worthy of competition. In the end, as he has done time and again, Styles proved his opponent wrong and walked away victorious. This time, his victim was Legends champion Booker T.

As part of a three-way match at Bound For Glory IV, Styles was on the losing end of a massive ax-kick by Booker, which planted the seeds for an intensely personal feud. In the weeks that followed, Booker and the rest of the Main Event Mafia viewed Styles as something of a nuisance. To them, Styles was good enough to maybe pull off an upset, but not a serious threat to the stability and dominance of the faction.

After two unsuccessful bids for the TNA World title—results in which Booker T was directly involved—Styles was shelved following an injury at the hands of Kurt Angle and missed more than a month of action. Still, the absence did not deter Booker from taking opportunities to call out and insult the injured Styles.

A.J. made his triumphant return at Against All Odds. Although not a part of Booker's match, Styles would steal the Legends championship belt and goad Booker—the actual titleholder—into a match at Destination X. It was there that Styles officially became the second Legends champion.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

### [ 40 ] Vickie Guerrero Named GM Of Raw Brand

When Randy Orton savagely attacked Stephanie McMahon in front of a helpless Triple-H, he did more than just infuriate the WWE champion and the McMahon family. He also created a vacancy in Raw's general manager position.

With Stephanie incapacitated, Smackdown GM Vickie Guerrero was named the interim general manager of the Raw brand in February.

Guerrero wasted little time in playing favorites and antagonizing John Cena, making Cena jump through hoops to get a rematch against World champion Edge. Then Guerrero surprised her husband by naming The Big Show as the top contender to Edge's championship, eventually changing the match into a three-way bout among Edge, Cena, and Show for WrestleMania after Cena went public with the Vicky/Show affair on *Raw*.

It didn't take long for Guerrero to become one of the most hated figures on the Raw brand. On the April 6 episode of *Raw*, Guerrero announced that she was presented with an offer of remaining the GM of Smackdown or becoming the full-time Raw general manager. To the dismay of Raw fans, Guerrero said she had decided to remain on the Raw brand, explaining that she felt Raw had grown "stale" and she was the person who could rectify that. In her first action as full-time GM, Vickie granted Edge a rematch against Cena in a last-man-standing match at Backlash.

She'll still play favorites and make life miserable for fan favorites, but Guerrero has already succeeded in shaking things up with creative and unpredictable matchmaking.



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## [ 41 ] Off-The-Wagon Challenge Drives Williams, Rock Out Of TNA

The 2008 *PWI* Tag Team of the Year winners defeated Consequences Creed and Lay Lethal at *Against All Odds*, and then decided it was time to shake things up with a bold challenge.

On the February 19 episode of *Impact*, James Storm and Robert Roode unveiled their Off-the-Wagon Challenge, issuing a standing open challenge: They would defend the TNA tag belts against any team. However, if they won the match, the wrestler Roode or Storm pinned or submitted would be forced to leave TNA.

Eric Young and Petey Williams were the first team to pick up the gauntlet, and the former Team Canada partners came close to winning the belts before Williams was pinned. As the gravity of the loss sank in, an emotional Williams was given a standing ovation by the fans in the Impact Zone, and just like that, the two-time X division champion was sent packing.

The next team to try its hand was The Rock 'N' Rave Infection. Once again, Storm and Roode came out on top and scored the pinfall on Lance Rock, who was forced to leave the promotion. Jimmy Rave also was released.

Homicide and Hernandez were willing to put their careers on the line and beat the champions by DQ, which allowed them to keep their jobs but didn't win them the straps.

The challenge ended at *Lockdown* when Team 3-D defeated Storm and Roode for the TNA belts in a match where Team 3-D's IWGP belts were also at stake.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

## [ 42 ] Sting Successfully Defends TNA World Title Against Angle, Team 3-D

Some critics would say Sting defied the odds when he upset Samoa Joe for the TNA World title at *Bound for Glory* 2008. But at the appropriately titled *Against All Odds* PPV, Sting was forced to defend his championship in a four-way match against one of the best technicians in the sport—Kurt Angle—and the most decorated tag team in wrestling history—Team 3-D.

The match started off like a typical tag team contest, but Sting and Angle—partners in the Main Event Mafia—were not a "typical" tag team. Angle's resentment of Sting had bubbled over into open hostility, and Sting kept a wary eye on Angle, waiting for a double-cross.

Team 3-D quickly ran Angle and Sting out of the ring to regroup, then Brother Ray laid down for Brother Devon since the winner of the pinfall would be declared champion, even if Sting wasn't pinned. Angle made the save.

Team 3-D enjoyed the advantage for most of the match, and it looked like there was little chance Sting would walk out of the ring with the TNA title in his possession. But Brothers Ray and Devon made a tactical mistake: Instead of pressing the advantage and ensuring the title was taken from the MEM, they started wrestling each other. This gave Sting and Angle a chance to regroup. In the end, Sting connected with a Scorpion Death Drop on Brother Ray to score the pinfall and retain his championship.

It was a missed opportunity for the Frontline and more frustration for Angle, but it was an impressive title defense by the face-painted veteran.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 43 ] Team F.I.S.T. Wins King Of Trios Tournament

Perhaps the most unique independent tournament of the year took place March 27-29 at The Arena in Philadelphia as CHIKARA presented the third annual King of Trios tournament.

Due to the shaky economy, this year's tournament was scaled back from 28 teams (in 2008) to 16 teams. Some of the more unique teams competing in this year's event were The Cold Front (Al Snow, Iceberg, and former WCW competitor Glacier), Incoherence (Delirious, Hallowicked, and Frightmare), and Team Uppercut (Claudio Castagnoli, Bryan Danielson, and Dave Taylor).

Team Uppercut established itself as the tourney favorites with a first-round victory over the team of Brodie Lee, Eddie Kingston, and Grizzly Redwood, followed by a quarterfinal victory over the team of Mike Quackenbush, Johnny Saint, and Jorge "Skayde" Rivera. Team Uppercut advanced to the finals with a win over the team of Vin Gerard, STIGMA, and former WWE competitor Colin Delaney.

Meanwhile, in the second tournament bracket, Team F.I.S.T. (Gran Akuma, Icarus, and Chuck Taylor) stormed its way to the finals with wins over The Death Match Kings (Necro Butcher, Toby Klein, and Brain Damage), The F1RST Family (Arik Cannon and the North Star Express), and The Future Is Now (Jimmy Olsen, Helios, and Lince Dorado).

In something of a surprising conclusion, Taylor locked Danielson in a half-crab, targeting Danielson's left knee, which had been injured earlier in the match. Danielson tapped out, giving Team F.I.S.T. the win. The tournament received strong critical praise and delivered exciting—and often controversial—bouts, and the King of Trios took another step toward becoming one of wrestling's top annual institutions.



Photo by Scott Finkelstein

### [ 44 ] Dragon Gate USA Launch Announced

American wrestling fans will be getting a dose of Japanese puroresu courtesy of the Dragon Gate promotion. The Japanese promotion known for high-flying and athletic contests announced the formation of an American brand, known as Dragon Gate USA. Former Ring of Honor booker Gabe Sapolsky was named vice president of the promotion, with the company's first event scheduled for July 25 at the former ECW Arena. CIMA, Dragon Kid, Naruki Doi, and Masato Yoshino were announced for the opening card.

Dragon Gate was formed in Mexico in 1999 and currently promotes more than 250 cards a year in Japan. The promotion plans to promote one card every two months in the U.S.

"This is a great opportunity to bring something new, fresh, and unique to American pro wrestling," Sapolsky said in a prepared statement. "DGUSA is going to be about quality over quantity. This is a haven for pro wrestling fans. Our goal is to become known as the premium brand in pro wrestling."

"The entire company in Japan is looking forward to bringing our style of wrestling to the United States," said DGUSA President Satoshi Oji. "The wrestlers are all very excited to make a new home in the United States."

The announcement effectively ended the working arrangement between Dragon Gate and Ring of Honor, Sapolsky's previous employer. Whether DGUSA can survive on its own in America, and how the company will coexist with its new rival, remain to be seen.



Photo by dgusa tv





## [ 45 ] Sting Becomes A Made Man At Sacrifice

Any confusion as to who was in charge of the Main Event Mafia was cleared up in May at TNA's Sacrifice pay-per-view when Sting pinned fellow member Kurt Angle to become the undisputed leader of the faction.

In a unique four-way main event, Sting, Angle, Mick Foley, and Jeff Jarrett each put something important on the line. By rule, the competitor who was pinned lost whatever he had at stake heading into the match. Were Sting to lose, his career would be over. TNA World champion Foley put the title up for grabs, naturally, whereas co-owner Jarrett staked his ownership shares in TNA on the outcome. Finally, it was Angle—the man who would suffer the pinfall loss—who risked, and lost, his role atop the MEM pecking order.

Seemingly out of the picture near the end of the bout, Sting seized the perfect opportunity—given to him by Jarrett—to capture the bout. After Jarrett drove Angle into a steel chair from the turnbuckle, it appeared he would grab the easy victory. But, sensing his chance, Sting slithered past Jarrett and covered Angle for the three-count.

## [ 46 ] Angelina Love Wins TNA Knockouts Title

In a division so dominated by one wrestler, new blood of any type is generally a welcome presence. But, in a strange sequence of events, the incumbent champion had begrudgingly earned the fans' preference given the alternative. Still, it was the cocky, stunning challenger that would capture both the day and the Knockouts championship.

At TNA's Lockdown pay-per-view on April 19, then-champion Awesome Kong—who had held the title for nearly six months—defended the gold in a three-way match with Taylor Wilde and The Beautiful People's Angelina Love. Love—the only competitor to never have held the Knockouts title at that time—was the clear underdog, failing in several prior attempts to win the championship. However, given the unpredictability that comes from a three-way match, as well as the six sides of steel, Love's chances to capture championship gold became as good as any of her opponents'.

Still, Love looked to ensure victory by having her fellow Beautiful Person Velvet Sky intervene. After tying a few of Kong's trademark hair braids to the cage wall, the bout essentially became a one-on-one with Wilde. With a relatively level playing field now in place, Love took advantage of the situation and pinned Wilde—despite having suffered a concussion. Fans, as well as Kong, were shocked at what had transpired; yet it was Love left standing as the Knockouts champion.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



## Mid-Year Report

The top 50 stories of the half-year

### [ 47 ] CZW Celebrates Its 10-Year Anniversary

When Combat Zone Wrestling began running cards, critics called the small independent promotion a knockoff of the original Extreme Championship Wrestling. Ten years later, CZW is still standing, while the extreme promotion that inspired it closed its doors, and came back as a watered-down version under the WWE banner.

On February 14, CZW celebrated its 10th anniversary of bloodletting and mayhem with a card that saw Drake Younger retain the CZW title in a No Ropes Barbed Wire Match against Eddie Kingston.

Since the promotion's first card on February 19, 1999, in Mantua, New Jersey, promoter/wrestler John Zandig has kept the hardcore style alive, featuring light tubes, thumbtacks, barbed wire, and even the occasional weed-whacker. Even after hardcore wrestling fell out of style in the early-2000s, CZW managed to retain its fan base by presenting intense, highly athletic bouts that mixed blood, death-defying highspots, and loads of unpredictability.

"Whether its blood and guts, high flyers, or whatever, we do our best to give these fans something to remember," Zandig told *PWI* Contributing Writer Louie Dee. "The Combat Zone isn't for everyone, but if you bust your ass, these fans will know it and respect you for it. They're loyal, and without that, we wouldn't be here today."

Zandig's "Bust Your Ass" formula seems to be working. CZW has endured while rival promotions have risen and fallen. Some call the CZW style "garbage" wrestling, but the renegade promotion has stood the test of time, and was even prominently featured in the film, *The Wrestler*.



Photo by Lyle C. Williams

### [ 48 ] Gail Kim Debuts On Smackdown

When it's good for business—and you are as stunning as Gail Kim is—WWE is happy to welcome back any former employee who may have worked for the competition for three years. That's just what happened in March when former WWE Womens and TNA Knockouts champion Gail Kim triumphantly returned to her former employer in Stamford, Connecticut.

Rumors circulated that Kim was considering a move back to WWE prior to her TNA contract expiring in August 2008, however all indications were that she would try to renegotiate a deal with her then-employer to stay in Orlando for the foreseeable future. When that did not happen immediately, indications grew stronger that a possible return engagement with the McMahons may soon be on the horizon.

All doubt was erased when vignettes began airing on *Smackdown* touting Kim's return to the fold. By month's end, Kim officially made her presence known by attacking Maryse and Michele McCool during their Divas title match on *Smackdown*. Kim firmly established herself as one of the top fan favorites immediately by taking out the two top villains of the Divas division in one glorious night.

Although her official, in-ring return would not occur until three nights later as a participant in an 18-Diva tag team match, Kim's impact on *Smackdown* was immediate as her mere appearance lent the Divas division a credibility and experience it had been lacking for quite some time.



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## [ 49 ] WWE Cuts Staff And Loses Legends To Retirement

In what has become an unfortunate rite of spring in WWE, the company reduced staff—both corporate and performers—in an effort to cut costs during this difficult economic time. While those losses were both initiated and expected by WWE, the retirements of two major players—and potential future Hall of Famers—was not a welcomed sight in Stamford.

Wrestles Val Venis, D'Lo Brown, Bam Neeley, Hade Vansen, Kevin Thorn, Mike Kruel, and The Boogeyman were released by WWE in early-January, along with crew members Tim White and Jim Korderas. The following weeks were no better with the releases of names such as Bob Holly, Ron Simmons, and Sgt. Slaughter leading the group. In all, 23 WWE employees were released.

Still, despite the mass exodus of talent, the retirements of both Tazz and John Bradshaw Layfield likely hit the company the hardest. Tazz—who was one-half of the *Smackdown* announce team at the time—chose to walk away from the industry once his contract ended following WrestleMania 25. The same went for JBL, whose final match was a 21-second loss of the Intercontinental title to Rey Mysterio Jr. at 'Mania. Taking the mike in the ring following the embarrassment—in his home state of Texas—Layfield announced his retirement and left the ring, and WWE, presumably for good.



Photo by Gary Dineen/Winning Image

## [ 50 ] All Four Champs Retain—But Not Win—At Judgment Day

Four incumbent champions walked in to Judgment Day intent on keeping their titles at all costs. Not surprisingly, Randy Orton was the only of the four to actually lose his match but find a way to hang on to the gold nevertheless.

Rivalling Edge for the title of "Ultimate Opportunist," Orton has quickly become the master of finding ways to lose a match but keep his title. In the WWE championship match at the pay-per-view, Orton squared off against challenger Batista who, in the weeks preceding the event had developed a bloodlust for destroying Orton and capturing the title in the process.

Deep into a fiercely fought match, Batista began to take control and appeared well on his way to warding off the advances of Legacy. Orton took one final step to ensure that no title change would occur: Orton slapped the referee, drawing a disqualification in the process.

In the other championship matches of the evening, ECW champ Christian retained cleanly with a win over Jack Swagger, as did Intercontinental titlist Rey Mysterio Jr. over Chris Jericho. Orton's former tag team partner Edge held on to the World title by beating Jeff Hardy after Matt Hardy interfered to cost his brother the match.



Photo by George Napolitano



# Mid-Year Report

The wacky and weird

**O**N PAGE 68 of this magazine, we recount the biggest stories of the half-year, recognize the best matches, and dole out our mid-year achievement awards and grades. But here is where we remember some of the more bizarre events of the first months of 2009, the curiously strange and downright ridiculous events and news stories that you won't be finding on any highlight reel. For lack of a better term, we group these oddball occurrences and low-lights as "The Wacky And Weird" ... and this half-year we had plenty of items to choose from.

In the most publicized slip-up of the year, **Hulk Hogan** put one of his size-14 feet in his mouth when he told *Rolling Stone* magazine he could "totally understand" why **O.J. Simpson** would allegedly kill his ex-wife. "I could have turned everything into a crime scene like O.J., cutting everybody's throat," Hogan said. "You live a half-mile from the 20,000-square-foot home you can't go to anymore, you're driving through downtown Clearwater and see a 19-year-old boy driving your Escalade, and you know that a 19-year-old boy is sleeping in your bed, with your wife ... I totally understand O.J. I get it."

Hogan later said that his comments were misunderstood, but his estranged wife, **Linda**, said Hogan's

comments were indicative of his inner rage and that she feared for her safety. Her lawyers also requested a substantial raise to her alimony payment so she could move further from Hogan for her own protection.

At least "The Hulkster" didn't threaten to drop the big leg on her.

In a case of life imitating art (or perhaps art imitating life), **Scott Siegel**, the actor who played a muscle-bound steroid pusher in the movie *The Wrestler* was arrested for ... dealing steroids. And all this time we just thought he was a remarkably convincing actor. We'll see if defense attorneys try to portray him as a method actor who just did a damn good job researching his role.

Of course, we can't ignore the "Miss WrestleMania" battle royal from WrestleMania 25. With **Gail Kim**, **Victoria**, and **Molly Holly** joining a field of women that included **Melina**, **Beth Phoenix**, **Mickie James**, and **Michelle McCool**, the bout promised perhaps the most talented group of women wrestlers to ever compete in one match ... and it was won by **Santino Marella**, in drag.

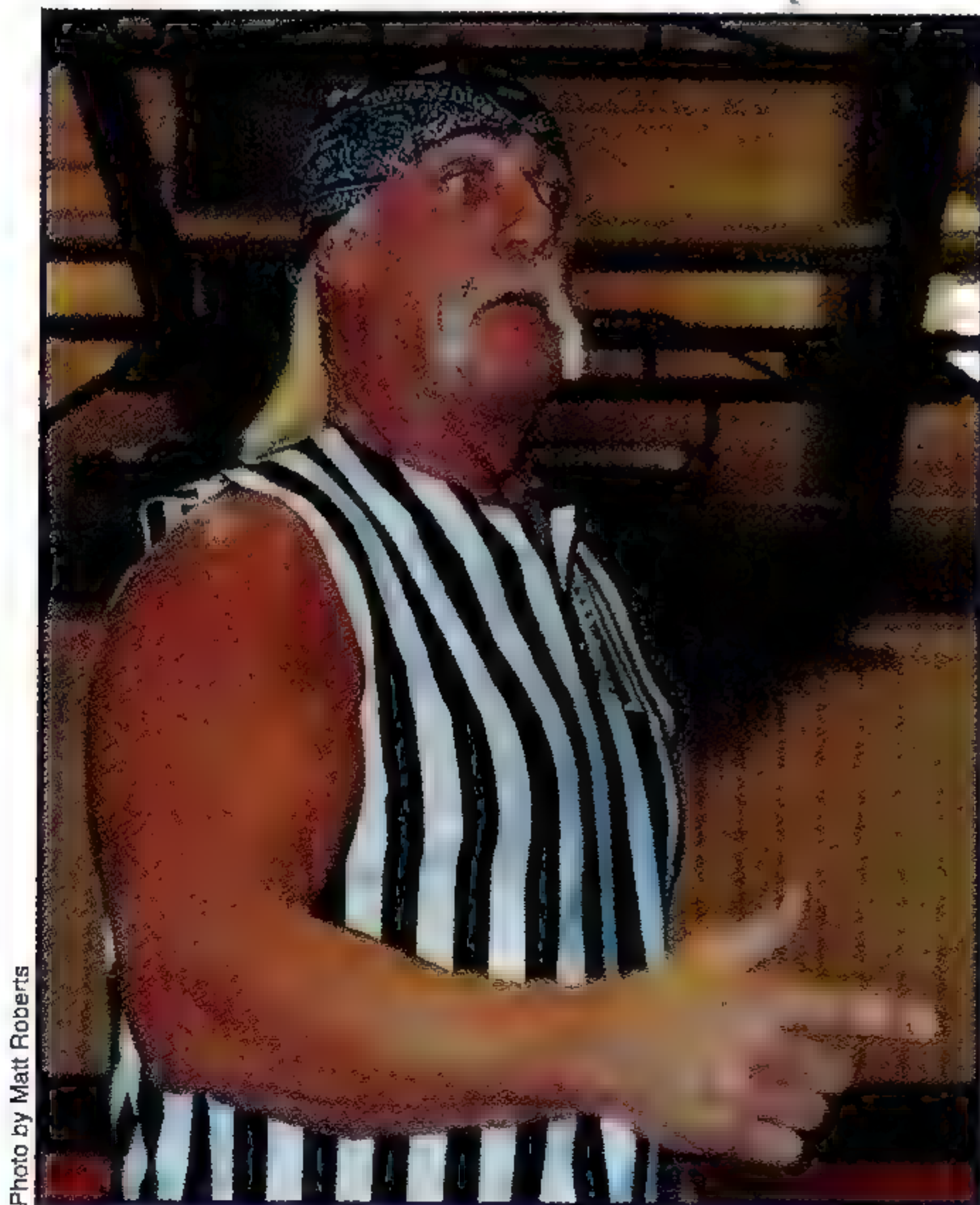


Photo by Matt Roberts

"Did I just say that, brother?"



Photo by George Napolitano

The former "Miss WrestleMania" holds forth





Photo by Lina South/TNA Wrestling

Chet Lemon with Black Snow calling the action

The whole match turned out to be the build-up for a lame comedy skit, with Santino posing as his "twin sister" Santina. It was painfully unfunny and a major waste of time. Worst of all, it was a slap in the face to the women, who were reduced to supporting players for a throwaway skit.

While on the subject of WrestleMania weekend, the Hall of Fame induction ceremony gave WWE the opportunity to honor living legends **Steve Austin**, the **Funk Brothers**, **Bill Watts**, the **Von Erichs**, and ... **Koko B. Ware**? Really? Koko's biggest WWE accomplishments were singing the title track on the *Piledriver* album and wearing clownishly oversized pants in a short-lived tag team with **Owen Hart**. Finally, the Hall of Fame has a member who is less deserving of induction than Vince Sr.'s limo driver.

And just in case anyone thought that the spirit of the original ECW was still alive, WWE reminded us that absolutely was not the case when the March 31 edition of *ECW On Sci Fi* featured a main event—a *main event!*—of **Nikki Bella** vs. **Brie Bella**. The only way that's hardcore is if **Kimona** and **Beulah** get involved!

Let's move on to TNA, a promotion with a long and storied history of providing us with plenty of wacky, weird, and WTF moments through the years. This half-year was no exception.

In January, the **Main Event Mafia** took over an episode of *Impact*. With announcers Chet Lemon (**Kevin**

**Nash**) and Black Snow (**Booker T**) calling the action in comically overdone fashion, the MEM presented us with an hour of foolishness, including a four-on-one handicap match pitting **ODB** against the **Kongtourage** and Booker T against referees **Rudy Charles** and **Andrew Thomas**. **Jim Cornette** and **Mick Foley** finally intervened and restored order, but the Mafia was determined to make a mockery of *Impact*, and it very nearly succeeded.

Of course, TNA all too often doesn't need the Mafia's help to make it look foolish. As Lockdown concluded, former ECW champion **Bobby Lashley** emerged onto the entrance ramp. **Kurt Angle** acted as if the Mafia had signed its biggest star ever. Only one problem: Lashley had never agreed to a contract with TNA. After a second appearance on *Impact*, Lashley vanished into thin air faster than you can say "Al Snow." Nothing makes a promotion look bush league quite like bringing in a big star, and forgetting a little thing like coming to terms on a contract.

And then there's the soap opera known as **Don West**. For seven years, West has served as a color commentator and pitchman for TNA. While he was particularly obnoxious in his first few years, he has actually developed into an insightful announcer. Out of nowhere, the jovial West suddenly decided to join the dark side, blowing up at broadcasting partner **Mike Tenay** on the February 26 edition of *Impact*.



## Mid-Year Report

The wacky and weird

West claimed that Tenay had badmouthed him to TNA management and said he and Tenay were no longer friends. Not only did West's behavior make no sense, but the storyline never went anywhere. Sometimes West portrays a heel announcer, sometimes he calls it straight. We guess it depends on what side of the bed he wakes up on in the morning.

No one has ever accused **The Beautiful People** of being Rhodes Scholars, but they seemed particularly foolish to believe **Daffney** was **Sarah Palin**. For more than a month (and more than three months after Palin and **John McCain** lost the presidential election), "**The Governor**" made fools of **Angelina Love** and **Velvet**

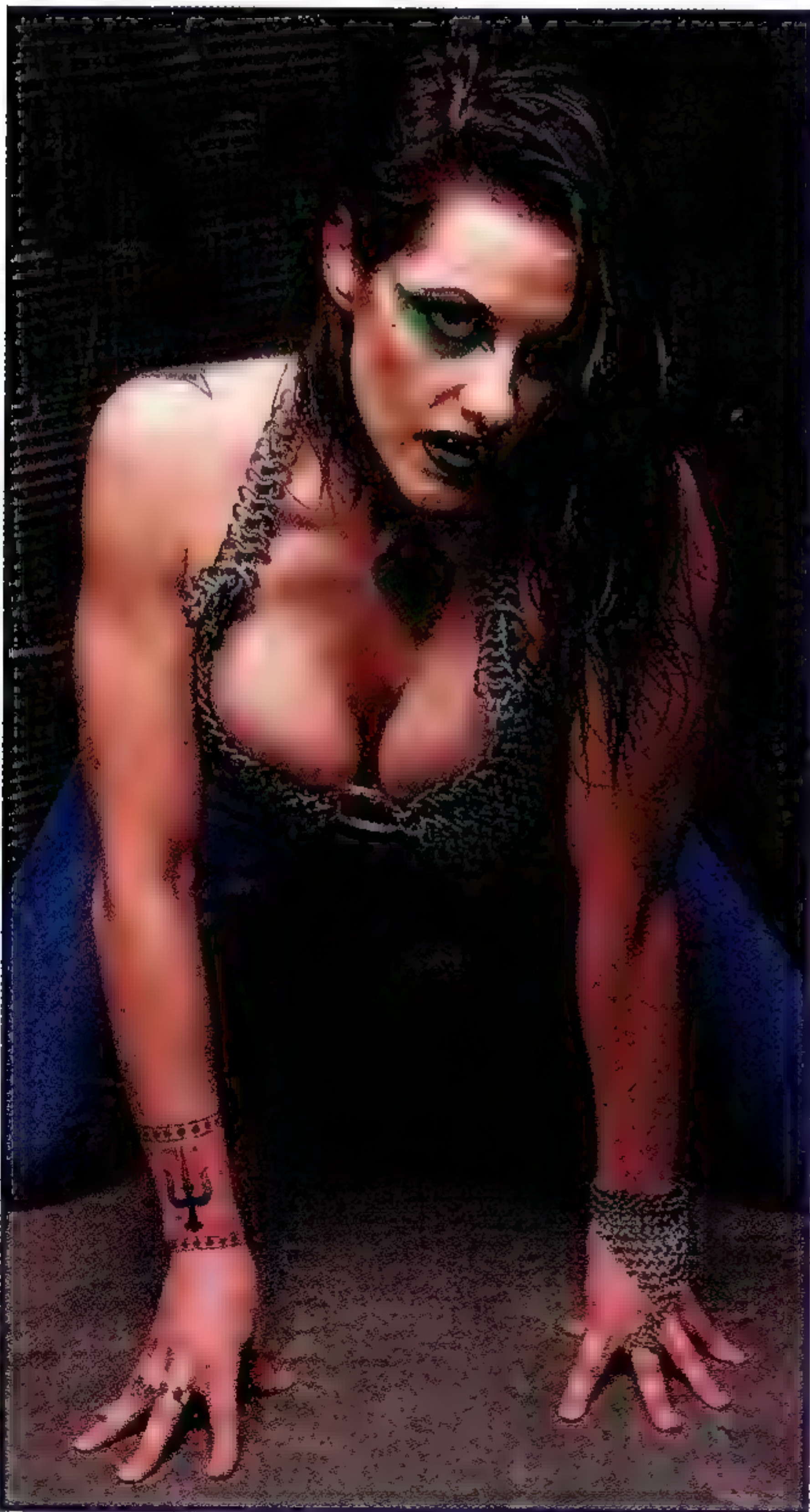


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Governor? Of Transylvania?



WWE Universe pushing back

**Sky**, promising to take them to the White House and give them Cabinet positions. This took place after TNA issued a public invitation to the real Sarah Palin to show up on *Impact*. Palin declined.

And the half-year wouldn't be complete without **Vince McMahon** partaking in some wacky and weird shenanigans. When the NBA conference finals caused a scheduling conflict at the Denver Pepsi Center, Denver Nuggets owner **Stan Kroenke** kicked WWE out of the building. McMahon didn't take the snub lying down, calling out Kroenke in the media and eventually moving *Raw* to Los Angeles (home of the Lakers, the Nuggets' conference finals opponents).

On the May 25 edition of *Raw*, McMahon got into an altercation with a Kroenke impostor. "When you push the WWE Universe, they push back," Mr. McMahon said, before pushing "Kroenke" to the floor as impostors **Jerry Buss**, **David Stern**, and **Jack Nicholson** looked on in faux horror.

Finally, we've known **Stevie Richards** for more than a decade. How come Dr. Stevie never mentioned his degree in psychology? Hmmm ...



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Where did Dr. Stevie get his Ph.D.?



# Mid-Year Report

## Top 10 PPV matches of the half-year

### [ 1 ] The Undertaker vs. Shawn Michaels (WrestleMania 25)

The back-and-forth encounter between "Mr. WrestleMania" and "Mr. Streak" exceeded all expectations, going more than 30 minutes. Undertaker survived a frightening suicide dive, and both men managed to kick out of the other's signature moves. It took Undertaker two Tombstones, a Last Ride, and a power bomb to finally put Michaels away. They may be at the tail-end of their careers, but once again, HBK and UT showed that no one can deliver in big matches the way they can.

### [ 2 ] Nigel McGuinness vs. Bryan Danielson (Rising Above)

Technically, Rising Above was taped in November 2008, but since it aired on PPV in January, it made the cut for half-year consideration. Danielson and the second longest-reigning champion in ROH history put on a technical wrestling clinic. Danielson seemed to have the match won when he hooked McGuinness in a triangle choke and began firing stiff elbows to the champion's head, but McGuinness rallied, eventually pinning Danielson at 28:14 after a pair of lariats.

### [ 3 ] Kurt Angle vs. Jeff Jarrett (Genesis)

Jarrett pulled out all the stops in his battle with the Olympic gold medalist. Angle busted Jarrett open with the ring bell, then slammed him through a table outside the ring, but Jarrett managed to get back into the ring and exchange submission holds with the master grappler. Jarrett managed to blast Angle with a steel chair, but the barely conscious Angle surprised him with a crucifix to score the pinfall.

### [ 4 ] Austin Aries vs. Jimmy Jacobs (Rising Above)

It was a bloody end to a particularly bloody feud. Austin Aries and Jimmy Jacobs squared off in an "I Quit" match. Jacobs drew first blood with a dog collar and chain, and then battered Aries with a chair. Lacey made a surprise return and wanted to throw in the towel to save Aries from further punishment, but the former ROH champ rallied and busted open Jacobs with a spike. Both men exchanged weapons shots and stiff knee strikes, but neither was willing to submit. Finally, Aries earned the win by repeatedly gouging Jacobs with a spike, forcing the Age of the Fall leader to say, "I quit."

### [ 5 ] Ultimate X (Destination X)

On paper, Suicide seemed to be at a severe disadvantage in the Ultimate X bout pitting him against Alex Shelley, Chris Sabin, Jay Lethal, and Consequences Creed. The other four participants had a tag team partner on hand to watch their backs. That also resulted in some divided loyalties, as established tag teams were forced to

compete against one another for the X division title. Suicide won the match—and the title—in dramatic fashion, diving from the structural support to the belt hanging high above the ring. It was a suicide dive if ever there were one.

### [ 6 ] Randy Orton vs. Shane McMahon (No Way Out)

Shane McMahon hasn't been an active wrestler in several years, but he was a ball of fire headed into this no-holds-barred match against the man who injured his father. Shane battered Orton with kendo sticks and garbage cans, and held his own against both Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr., even hitting his impressive Van Terminator cross-ring dropkick on Rhodes. The tide turned when Shane missed an elbow on Orton, who was lying on the announcers' table. After a superplex through a table, a bloody Orton was able to connect with his RKO to seal the victory.

### [ 7 ] Money in the Bank ladder match (WrestleMania 25)

Forget about scientific wrestling, psychology, or pacing. This year's Money in the Bank match was the opening bout on the WrestleMania 25 broadcast and it set the tone for the night with a high-energy demolition derby of a match. Kofi Kingston's catlike agility and Shelton Benjamin's fearlessness provided some memorable moments, but once again it was Q.M. Punk who scaled the ladder and retrieved the briefcase.

### [ 8 ] Rey Mysterio Jr. vs. Chris Jericho (Judgment Day)

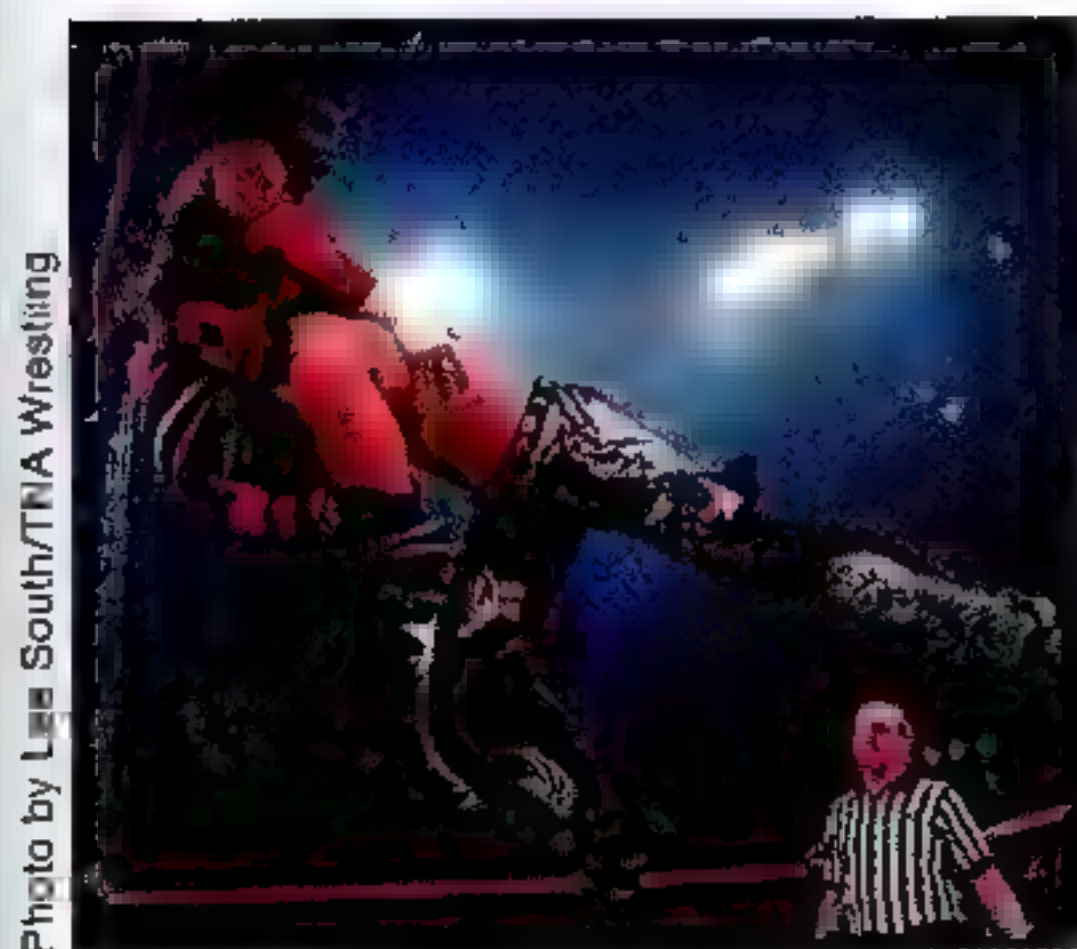
The Intercontinental title match was a classic aerialist vs. ring technician battle. Mysterio rocked Jericho early with a series of seated sentons, but Jericho was able to slow the pace with a chinlock in the middle of the ring. Jericho nearly took the bout with the Walls of Jericho, but Mysterio rallied, connecting with the 619 and a big splash to earn the win. It was an exciting scrap between former world champs that brought to mind some of the classic Intercontinental title bouts of yesteryear.

### [ 9 ] Team 3-D vs. Beer Money Inc. (Lockdown)

If this match took place in The Impact Zone, it might not have made this list. But this tag team battle between the TNA World tag team champs and the IWGP champs took place in Philadelphia, where Team 3-D could be just as popular as the Eagles, Flyers, and Phillies. This Philadelphia Street Fight spilled all over the building before Brothers Ray and Devon caught Robert Roode with a 3-D through a table to score the pinfall and draw a huge ovation from the crowd.

### [ 10 ] The Royal Rumble Match (Royal Rumble)

The Royal Rumble match is always one of the most intriguing matches of the year, and it usually provides a few good surprises and some memorable moments. Rob Van Dam made a surprise return and looked like he never missed a step. The biggest story of the match, however, was whether Randy Orton and Legacy would be able to hold off Triple-H, who was out to win the match and get revenge on Orton for attacking Vince McMahon.



Chris Sabin vs. Consequences Creed

Photo by L.A. South/TNA Wrestling



## Mid-Year Awards

### Wrestler of the Half-Year: Randy Orton

While we don't condone many of his tactics, there's no arguing with Randy Orton's record. The third-generation star promised he would win the Royal Rumble and went out and did just that (with a healthy bit of assistance from Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr.). He said he would teach Shane McMahon some respect at No Way Out, and he did.

True, Orton came up short at WrestleMania, but he had an opportunity to win the main event of 'Mania in record time when he kayoed Triple-H with an RKO in the opening seconds of the match. Had he not opted to inflict more punishment instead of claiming the easy pinfall, it would have been the most shocking end to a WrestleMania ever. And though Triple-H ultimately won the match, he needed to use his ever-present sledgehammer to put Orton down for the count.

At Backlash, a new "Age Of Orton" began as the "Legend Killer" laid out Triple-H, then put "The Game" on the disabled list with a vicious punt to the head.

No wrestler has been as consistent through the first six months of 2009 as Orton. While his contemporaries have bounced between brands or lost time to injuries, Orton has been at the top of his game, ruling Raw with an iron fist.

Not only did Orton regain the championship he covets, but he also established the top heel stable in WWE with Legacy. Orton always wanted to be the crown jewel of Evolution, but that spot was always reserved for Triple-H. Now Orton is the kingpin of his own clique, and HHH, Batista, and Ric Flair are stuck on the outside looking in.



Photo by George Napolitano

### Tag Team of the Half-Year: Beer Money Inc.

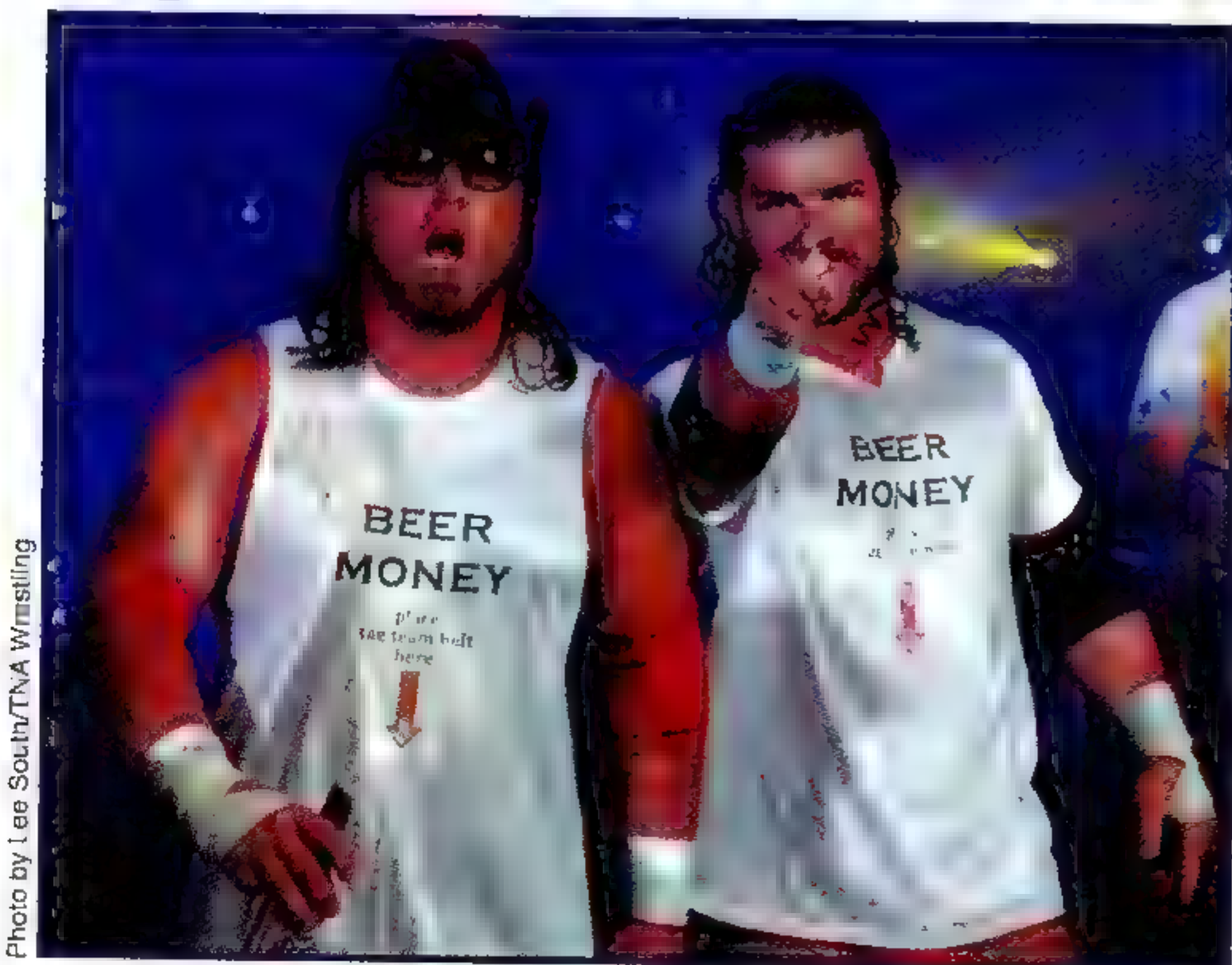


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

It's hard to believe that Robert Roode and James Storm have been regularly teaming only for about a year now. They have jelled into one of the finest tandems in the sport, and quite possibly one of the best teams wrestling has seen in several years.

Both men had experience as tag team competitors before the drunken cowboy and the self-made millionaire decided to team up. Storm's roughhouse brawling style perfectly complements Roode's methodical, mat-based attacks. Roode is the sound technician, and Storm is the unpredictable hell-raiser. Together, Beer Money Inc. has been almost unbeatable.

Roode and Storm successfully defended the TNA World tag team title against the company's top teams, including The Motor City Machine Guns (arguably the second-best tag team of the half-year), LAX, Abyss and Matt Morgan, and many others. When they had run out of challengers, they issued

the Off-the-Wagon Challenge, an open invitation to any team that wanted a title shot.

Beer Money lost the tag belts to Team 3-D, but they bounced back in a big way by winning Team 3-D's Invitational Tag Team Tournament. Roode and Storm bested Lethal Consequences, the impromptu team of Eric Young and Jethro Holiday, and the very impressive British Invasion to win the tournament and restore their position as the top contenders to the tag team belts.

PWI readers voted Beer Money Tag Team of the Year for 2008. They're on pace to win that award in back-to-back years.



## Most Popular Wrestler of the Half-Year: John Cena

John Cena will probably always be a polarizing figure. As popular as he is, there's still a passionate core of fans who absolutely despise him. But, gradually, the number of haters is diminishing.

Take a look around an arena during a WWE show and try to count all the John Cena T-shirts, hats, foam fingers, and signs. By our unscientific count at one show, about one out of every seven fans proudly sported some type of Cena apparel. For as much as his critics hate him, Cena is far and away the most popular wrestler in the sport today ... and he has been for some time.

The Cena-bashers may loathe his often-juvenile promos or criticize his wrestling skills, but objectively, it's hard to knock West Newbury's favorite son. Cena has welcomed the opportunity to be a role model and genuinely enjoys the support of his fans. He's a health nut who keeps himself in spectacular physical condition. He makes time to sign autographs and make appearances for charities, hospitals, and other organizations. He has become pro wrestling's goodwill ambassador to the world, and has stayed loyal to his wrestling roots even as his acting career begins to take off.

Cena is a throwback (pun fully intended) to a simpler time of clean-cut good guys and villainous bad guys, and Cena is a "good guy" in every sense of the world. That may not play well to the same fans who booed Bob Backlund, Hulk Hogan, and the pre-Rock Rocky Maivia, but Cena has proven, time and time again, that he *is* the people's champion. And if you don't believe us, just take a good listen to the ovation he gets when his entrance music sounds.



Photo by George Napolitano

## Most Hated Wrestler of the Half-Year: Edge

Edge wears his designation as the "Ultimate Opportunist" as if it's a badge of honor. The fact of the matter is that Edge has continually proven that he will sink to any depth to keep a world championship belt around his waist. He has become romantically involved with a WWE general manager, hijacked Money in the Bank title shots, attacked wrestlers and stolen their title shots ... even changed brands in the middle of the No Way Out pay-per-view.

There's no question that Edge gets results, but he's forgetting one important truth: A title belt is only as prestigious as the man holding it is honorable.

Edge has never conducted himself as a champion. He whines and pouts over losses, relies on political maneuvering to score title shots, attacks opponents, and ducks challengers. He relies on outside interference to retain his title, yet constantly proclaims himself to be the greatest wrestler of his era.

In short, he is everything that fans hate. He fights without honor, is willing to intentionally injure opponents, and is more likely to use political clout to stay on top than to use his God-given talents and abilities. He devalues every championship he holds and rarely wins matches without copious amounts of outside interference.

Edge's nearest competition in the Most Hated category was his former "Rated RKO" teammate Randy Orton, but Orton has recently been hearing a noticeable amount of cheers. In TNA, only Kurt Angle came close to reaching the level of heat Edge routinely draws. The two factors that put the "Rated R Superstar" over the top are his unbridled opportunism and his sickeningly nepotistic relationship with Vickie Guerrero.



Photo by George Napolitano



# Mid-Year Grades

**THE MID-YEAR GRADES ARE IN** ... Just a couple of months ago, the editors of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* issued our annual "Report Cards" issue to 50 of the sport's top stars. Those report cards provided an in-depth look at the achievements (or lack thereof) of those wrestlers through a 12-month period.

Here, we cut right to the chase with a quick and easy analysis of how some of wrestling's top names have fared thus far in 2009.

The wrestlers earning A's and B's (and A's were particularly hard to come by this year) have exceeded expectations this year. Wrestlers earning C's and D's need to do something to pull themselves up. The unlucky grapplers who earned F's need to make some drastic changes before they find themselves "Future Endeavored" back down to the independent circuit.

The grades are in. Now let's sort out the honor roll from the class clowns.

**THEY GET AN "A":** **Sting** ruled TNA for most of the grading period and showed he can still compete with men half his age ... The only blemish on **Randy Orton's** record was his loss at WrestleMania ... Brand boundaries apparently mean nothing to **Edge**, who finds new ways to win championships seemingly at will ... **Triple-H** was unstoppable through Backlash ... **Beer Money Inc.** lost the tag belts but came back to win the Team 3-D Invitational Tag Team Tournament, bolstering their claim of being the top team in TNA, if not the sport ... **John Cena** has had a pair of world title reigns but he has struggled to hold on to a belt



Photo by George Mapolitano

... **Hiroshi Tanahashi** has been dominant since earning the IWGP strap.

## THEY GET A "B": C.M.

**Punk** won the Money in the Bank ladder match once again and seems to have Edge's number ...

**Suicide** has made the X division interesting again, regardless of who's under the mask ... **Jerry Lynn** was able to knock Nigel McGuinness off his perch and took the helm of Ring of Honor during a critical period for the company... **Kofi Kingston** was the show-stealer in this year's MITB match ...

**Angelina Love** managed to provoke Awesome Kong and survive as TNA Knockouts champion ... **Jack Swagger** had an impressive ECW title run and may just be WWE's next breakout star ... **A.J. Styles** became "The Phenomenal Legend" after taking Booker's title ... **Evan Bourne** has been a shining star, but his injured ankle prevented him from flying higher ... **The Miz** is actually developing into a top-level performer. Who would have guessed? ... **Booker T** has been the true workhorse and unsung hero of the MEM ... **Team 3-D** added both the TNA and IWGP championships to their staggeringly long resume ... **MVP** rebounded from an embarrassing losing streak by becoming one of the top stars on Raw, and won props from *The View* ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** returned from injury and scored the I-C title in record time ... **Tyler Black** seems destined to capture the ROH title, but he needs to make his move quickly ... **Jeff Hardy** has had moments of greatness but is simply too erratic for his own good ... **Big Show** made it to a 'Mania title match, he just had to do some cuddling with Vickie Guerrero to get there.

**THEY GET A "C":** **Mick Foley** has wrestled only a handful of matches all year, but still managed to capture the TNA World title ... Yeah, they helped Orton to the top, but **Cody Rhodes** and **Ted DiBiase Jr.** have slipped from being a championship tandem to a pair of stooges ... **Shawn Michaels** delivered at 'Mania, but a stint as JBL's goof and a lengthy post-'Mania hiatus hurts his grade ... **Matt Morgan** dominated Abyss and looked impressive in trying to catch the eye of the Main Event Mafia ... **Samoa Joe** is dangerous and unpredictable, but continually getting himself disqualified is getting him nowhere—and his "tribal" tattoo looks



Photo by Matt Roberts





ridiculous ... **Kevin Nash** and **Scott Steiner** are much more effective in gang-style beatdowns than they are in singles competition ... **The Colons** unified the WWE and World tag team titles, but left us trying to answer a perplexing question: If you make history and no one cares, did you really make history? ... **Christian** made his WWE return and captured the ECW title, but we expected bigger and better things from him ... **Matt Hardy** won at 'Mania, but the loss at Backlash stopped his momentum cold ... **Awesome Kong's** aura of invincibility has diminished, but don't expect us to say that to her face ... **John Morrison** is still getting used to hearing cheers and doesn't quite seem comfortable yet ... **Chris Jericho** beat up on the legends, only to get cold-cocked by a decidedly "un-legendary" former boxer.

**THEY GET A "D":** **Kurt Angle** has been pinned repeatedly by Sting and Jeff Jarrett and the TNA World title is getting

further and further from his grasp ... **Mickie James** is simply too talented to have gone this long without challenging for a title ... We wonder if **Gail Kim** is regretting leaving TNA these days ... **Eric Young** has been on the cusp of stardom for two years now, but has developed an annoying habit of demanding opportunities and then coming up short ... **Vladimir Kozlov** went from headlining Smackdown to squash matches on ECW; that's a lousy career trajectory ... **Rhino** has gone MIA from the Frontline ...



**Jay Lethal** and **Consequences Creed** need to get an image consultant post-haste—they're both stale *and* unfunny ... **ODB** has fallen off the face of the planet now that **Awesome Kong** is a fan favorite ... **Kane** has been the most irrelevant man/monster since **Nessie**.

**THEY GET AN "F":** Believe it or not, we predicted **William Regal** would win a

world title in last year's "Second Half Predictions"—what happened? ... **Santino Marella** may be hysterical, but his run as **Santina** was just embarrassing ... For a man claiming to retire if he doesn't win the ECW championship, **Tommy Dreamer** has looked unimpressive ... **The Rock 'n' Rave Infection** and **Petey Williams** were kicked to the curb, courtesy of Beer Money Inc. ... Has anyone even seen **Mark Henry** lately? How does a guy that big go missing? ... **The Great Khali**, ditto ... **The Bella Twins** do very little and take up twice as much space ... **Cute Kip** actually lost a stretcher match to a woman—and that was one of his *highlights* of the past six months ... **Ricky Ortiz** might want to consider shilling his rally towels in ShamWow-style infomercials, because he's not accomplishing much of anything in the ring ... **Abyss's** psychiatrist is so bad, the big man would probably have been better off staying with his abusive father, **James Mitchell**.

**THEY GET AN INCOMPLETE:** **Ricky Steamboat Jr.** has looked very impressive, but it's hard to tell if he has staying power ... There's no telling how much longer **Nigel McGuinness** could have held the ROH title if not for his injury ... **Jeff Jarrett** has looked terrific with wins over Kurt Angle, but he needs to decide if he's a full-time wrestler or TNA exec—he can't have it both ways ... **Tyson Kidd** and **D.H. Smith** are off to a good start, but can this new foundation live up to the legacy of the Harts and the Bulldogs? ... **The Undertaker** was incredible at WrestleMania, but has been invisible ever since ... **Cody Deaner** has had some entertaining moments, but can this guy be more than comic relief? ... **Umaga** has looked good since returning, but missed a lot of time to injuries. □



Photo by George Napolitano



## Mid-Year Report

### Second-half predictions

#### C.M. Punk Will Cash In Money In The Bank ... And Fail

These days, it seems like everything is going C.M. Punk's way. He possesses a title shot he can cash in at a moment's notice, any time at his discretion. He has World champion Edge running scared and has already beaten the champ in non-title matches. It seems like it's only a matter of time before Punk cashes in the title shot and relieves Edge of his title belt, just as he did a year ago.



Photo by George Napolitano

It's not going to happen, though.

Punk has already squandered some perfect opportunities to cash in. He's shown his hand, and Edge knows that Punk is just waiting for the right moment to sneak up on him. Edge is too smart to let his guard down. Whether it's Umaga, the former Edge-heads, or someone else, Edge will make sure he has somebody watching his back at all times.

**Punk: not so lucky this time**

And, deep down, Punk knows he needs to win a world title the traditional way if he ever wants respect. Cashing in a title shot is convenient, but recent losses to Kane and Umaga show that Punk doesn't deserve a world title quite yet. His MITB won't yield title gold this time. And, in the long run, that will be better for Punk.

#### The Main Event Mafia Will Disband

Kurt Angle brought together his motley crew of former world champions by getting them to agree that the younger stars weren't giving them the respect they deserved.

Over the past nine months, the Mafia has won the respect it craved. In fact, it's looking more and more as if the only reason for keeping the Mafia together was for Kurt Angle to keep himself in the title picture.

Now that Sting has deposed Angle as godfather of the MEM, there is no reason for the Mafia to exist. Despite his association with the MEM, Sting is—for all intents and purposes—a fan favorite. Booker T must be getting frustrated at being shut out of TNA World title conten-

tion, especially after struggling against A.J. Styles. Kevin Nash is preoccupied with Jenna Morasca, and the World title has slipped out of the Mafia's grasp and into Mick Foley's.

Angle will be the first to break ranks, forming a new alliance with Matt Morgan and Bobby Lashley. Booker T will follow suit and rejoin Sharmell to challenge either Foley or Jeff Jarrett for the World title. Sting will end his career as a full-fledged fan favorite, while Nash will take Cute Kip's place as a "Special Consultant" to The Beautiful People.

#### Rey Mysterio Jr. Will Put His Mask Up Against Chris Jericho's Hair

Chris Jericho and Rey Mysterio Jr. have known each other for a long time, and they've never been particularly friendly. Back in their WCW days, Jericho tried to destroy Mysterio's knee with a steel toolbox, sidelining Rey for more than six months.

Jericho, who competed extensively in Mexico early in his career, knows how important the mask is in the lucha libre tradition. He gloated over taking Juventud Guerrera's mask in WCW, and would like nothing better than to do the same to Mysterio.

Jericho has shown he isn't afraid to cross boundary lines in his feuds with Shawn Michaels and Ric Flair. Jericho always focuses on his opponent's greatest weakness, and then exploits it mercilessly.

At SummerSlam, more than the I-C title will be at stake when Jericho and Mysterio clash. Mysterio will also agree to put up his mask if Jericho agrees to put his hair on the line. In a Match of the Year contender, Mysterio will score the pinfall on Jericho with a La Magistral cradle and



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

**One big, dysfunctional family**



Jericho will be forced to suffer the ignominy of having his head shaved bald.

Here's the bad news ... the loss will only make Jericho more bitter. An intense Jericho will cause headaches for the entire Smackdown roster through the remainder of the year.

### **Randy Orton Will Become A Fan Favorite**

Listen carefully and you will notice that "The Legend Killer"—the vile, sadistic lunatic—is slowly but surely building a groundswell of crowd support. It seems hard to imagine any scenario where someone so devious could ever be accepted as a full-fledged fan favorite, but it will happen.

Shortly after SummerSlam, Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr. will finally become fed up with Orton's de-

mands. DiBiase still harbors some animosity at Orton for when he punted him in the head last year, and he and Rhodes are biding their time to even the score.

Rhodes and DiBiase will join an exhausted Orton in the ring after a successful title defense, and will then attack the champion, leaving Orton a bloody mess. Orton will declare war on his former partners and the fans will side with him.

One man who will not side with

him, however, will be the returning Triple-H. The Orton/HHH feud is far from over, but when it resumes, it will be Orton hearing the cheers and Triple-H being booed out of buildings.

### **The Miz Will Win The U.S. Title**

When the draft sent The Miz from Smackdown to Raw, conventional wisdom was that he would take a spot on the mid-card, while his former partner, John Morrison, would go on to bigger and better things. After all, Morrison is a former ECW and Intercontinental champion, while

Miz was a virtual laughingstock before hooking up with "The Shaman Of Sexy."

Instead, The Miz has been a swaggering success on Raw. He had the audacity to call out John Cena (who was injured at the time) on multiple occasions, and has claimed "forfeit victories" when Cena failed to appear. Miz is starting to catch fire on the Raw brand, and soon he will be in prime position for a U.S. title shot against MVP.

MVP has achieved quite a bit on Raw, but he's also made plenty of enemies. Look for Miz to capitalize on some outside interference from one of MVP's enemies and snag the title.

### **Tyler Black Will Win The ROH Title**

The Midwestern standout first captured the imagination of Ring of Honor fans at Take No Prisoners in 2008. Tyler Black defeated Go Shiozaki, Claudio Castagnoli, and Delirious in a four-corners match to earn a title match against then-champion Nigel McGuinness later that night. The former Age of the Fall member took McGuinness to the limit and came agonizingly close to winning the ROH title.

When word got out that McGuinness would require

surgery due to an arm injury, Black was seen as one of the most likely candidates to end his reign. Instead, it was Jerry Lynn who did the honors. Now the stage is set for a classic passing-of-the-torch match: the grizzled veteran against the upstart newcomer with loads of charisma. Black vs. Lynn will be ROH's feud of the year, and that feud will conclude with Black winning the championship.

In many respects, Black is reminiscent of a young C.M. Punk. Punk had to work for several years to get his hands on the ROH championship; Black's road to the Promised Land will be much shorter. □



Photo by Gilgore Napolitano

Can he be a sympathetic figure?



Photo by Joe Zanolle

Gold for Black



# the business page

By Harry Burkett



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Pushing the subject just a bit further, McMahon had his top stars compete in a "Nuggets vs. Lakers" eight-man tag match. The winning team, of course, was the hometown favorite, all decked-out in Lakers jerseys.

## Vinnie Mac goes on the attack ...

WWE Chairman Vince McMahon shot and scored in his public relations battle with Denver Nuggets owner E. Stan Kroenke, making the Memorial Day edition of *Raw* a show to remember. A scheduling conflict occurred when the Nuggets made it to the NBA Western Conference Finals as Game Four was to be played on May 25 at the Pepsi Center in Denver—the same night and location as *Raw*.

Kroenke Sports Enterprises, which also owns the Pepsi Center in Denver, admitted it was a mistake to have scheduled a WWE event on a night when a playoff home game for the Nuggets was a possibility. Quite fittingly, WWE hastily arranged to hold *Raw* at the Staples Center—home of the Nuggets' opponents, the Los Angeles Lakers.

McMahon had fun at Kroenke's expense during that edition of *Raw*. He confronted a Kroenke look-alike in the opening segment, ridiculing his business acumen and mocking his name. Indeed, McMahon must have had Robert E. "Ted" Turner in mind when he told the faux Enos Kroenke that he hated anyone with "E." as an initial.

On ESPN Radio in Los Angeles, McMahon said it was impossible for Kroenke to make adequate restitution for the scheduling controversy. He also dismissed the offer to tape *Raw* at the Pepsi Center on the previous Sunday. In the end, McMahon was angry at Kroenke's refusal to make personal amends.

"It's ironic no one from the media can find this guy," he said. "No one has a quote from him, no television cameras can get him, no radio. This guy will not come to a microphone. He won't be held accountable for his actions in the media ... By the way, the other thing they did not do is they haven't apologized. Can you imagine that? They haven't apologized anywhere in the media, they haven't apologized to me."

Not surprisingly, Kroenke Sports Enterprises wasn't pleased by how McMahon handled the situation. "Despite the propaganda campaign



launched by WWE and Chairman Vince McMahon, the KSE team maintained a professional manner throughout this process," said Paul Andrews, the company's executive vice president. "We had hoped for, and worked toward an amicable resolution, which we verbally had on [the previous] Tuesday ... It's unfortunate and disappointing that WWE executives ultimately chose this path."

Despite the deal with the Staples Center being finalized only a few days earlier, more than 9,000 fans attended the May 25 *Raw*. *Smackdown* was also moved and scheduled to be taped at the Staples Center the following night.

**It's all about the ratings ...** Newsflash: It has been learned that TNA Creative structures its television product—including which wrestlers receive the most airtime—based on what numbers they can generate for Spike TV. This shocking revelation came to light during Christopher Daniels' recent interview with *The (Charlotte) Post & Courier*.

Daniels' answer was in response to why members of the Main Event Mafia—with most approaching or past 50 years of age—dominate *Impact* although they do not represent the future of the company. Essentially, Daniels said it is done to prove to Spike TV that they are making maximum use of their star-power to generate the highest ratings possible.

"Once Spike TV became a priority ... they were looking for a certain rating," said Daniels. "Sometimes it's hard to justify having guys that, even though talent-wise can fit the bill, you've got executives looking for ratings and wondering why it's not happening. It becomes a balancing act where you're trying to get guys with names and guys with talent." Added Daniels, "Sometimes you can second-guess decisions all you want, but sometimes you're really stuck."

It's interesting that TNA defended its use of veterans during *Impact*'s early days on Spike TV, suggesting name recognition was the key to hooking casual viewers and that the

booking philosophy might change when it had the luxury of adopting a longer-term approach. Like TNA management, Daniels now understands that short-term sacrifice for long-term gain is nearly impossible in the super-competitive television industry.

**WWE gets jakked around ...** Since it was discovered that a licensing agent working on behalf of WWE received kickback money from toymaker Jakks Pacific and shared the booty with a WWE vice president, the relationship between WWE and Jakks Pacific has been strained to say the least. WWE alleges Jakks Pacific purposely funneled money to key figures in WWE's licensing department in order to steer contracts its way.

The U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York previously dismissed a suit that WWE brought against Jakks, seeking to void toy and video game licenses with the company. On May 20, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit agreed with the previous rul-



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Daniels may have let the cat out of the bag when he told *The (Charlotte) Post & Courier* that TNA bases its programming on who people want to see. Giving the fans what they want. Hmm, that sounds like a smart business strategy.

ing, finding that the scandal had not affected the agreements in question.

WWE plans to deal with Mattel after its current contract expires in 2010. At that time, Jakks will take on TNA as a client.

## WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of May 1 to 31, 2009)

**30-Day High:** 12.48 on May 29

**30-Day Low:** 10.67 on May 1

**52-Week High:** 17.13 on August 5, 2008

**52-Week Low:** 8.76 on November 21, 2008

WWE stock trended in the right direction throughout May, steadily increasing in value from 10.67 on the first trading day of the month and reaching 12.48 on the last—despite the sobering news revealed in WWE's report on its first quarter, ending March 31.

Pay-per-view buy rates went down, with the Royal Rumble dropping from 533,000 to 450,000, compared to 2008. No Way Out fell from 329,000 to 272,000. WrestleMania 25's official buy rate is not yet available, but it is assumed to be well below last year's 1,058,000.

Excluding WrestleMania 24 from last year's first quarter (because WM25 figures weren't included in this year's report), live event revenue in North America dipped only slightly, from \$18.7-million to \$17-million. However, there are two caveats: WWE ran 83 shows this year compared to only 66 shows in the first quarter of 2008, and the average ticket price was significantly lower this year. Even in the usually strong category of international live events, revenues dropped from \$2.8-million to \$1-million.

Resisting the overall trend was television rights revenues (from \$24-million to \$24.9-million), WWE 24/7 (from \$1.5-million to \$1.6-million), and magazine publishing (from \$2.9-million to \$3.5-million).



# TV breakdown

## RAW (USA)

May 4: 3.3  
May 11: 3.3  
May 18: 3.6  
May 25: 3.2

**Analysis:** It seems those 4.0 ratings that Raw scored in February vanished along with all the WrestleMania hype. And it doesn't seem the talent draft did anything to help matters, as Raw dropped to an overall rating of 3.3 on May 4, its lowest number since December 29, which drew an expectedly low rating because it was situated between the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Fortunately, Raw bounced back to a more respectable 3.6 on May 18, thanks to a star-studded main event pitting John Cena and Batista against WWE champion Randy Orton, Ted DiBiase Jr., and Cody Rhodes, and a special appearance by 16-time world champion Ric Flair. Even Vince McMahon conceded that Raw was likely to lose to the NBA playoff game between the Nuggets and the Lakers on May 25. That had to give Enos Stan Kroenke some solace.

## SMACKDOWN (MyNetworkTV)

May 1: 1.9  
May 8: 1.9  
May 15: 1.9  
May 22: 1.6  
May 29: 1.7

**Analysis:** Like Raw, the post-WrestleMania period has been difficult. Smackdown hasn't reached the 2.0-mark since April 17, rendering the talent draft virtually meaningless from a ratings standpoint. With Chris Jericho, C.M. Punk, and I-C champ Rey Mysterio Jr. among the former Raw wrestlers moving to Smackdown, it was believed that the blue brand's existing stars—including World champion Edge and Jeff Hardy—would benefit from the boost. That hasn't happened yet. Even an unlikely match between champion Edge and challenger Jericho on the May 1 broadcast failed to help Smackdown's numbers. But, remember, all of this is relative. More males tuned in to the lackluster April 24 edition of Smackdown, which scored only a 1.6, than any program on NBC, ABC, Fox, and the CW that week.

## ECW (Sci Fi)

April 28: 1.2  
May 5: 1.1  
May 12: 0.9  
May 19: 1.1  
May 26: 1.0

**Analysis:** May 5 will go down as a dark day in the history of ECW. That is the date of ECW's first clear-cut, undisputed loss to Impact. In the end, a change in time slot—from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. Eastern—was the determining factor, with ECW dipping by an ever-so-slight one-tenth of a point, just enough to lose the night. For those wondering how the change would affect ECW, we have our answer. To be fair, the ratings "war" between ECW and Impact is an artificial one because the two programs don't even air on the same night. But, to TNA management, defeating a prime time WWE program has been a longtime goal and ECW was the only one in reach. That is, until WWE Superstars came along on WGN America—a show that TNA has been outscoring handily on Thursday nights since its April 16 premiere.

## IMPACT (Spike TV)

April 30: 1.2  
May 7: 1.2  
May 14: 1.2  
May 21: 1.1  
May 28: 1.2

**Analysis:** Dixie Carter and Jeff Jarrett probably popped open the champagne when Impact's ratings for May 7 became official, revealing that Impact had actually outscored ECW for the first week ever. It's an important moral victory for all of TNA, but should be considered only a milestone in the company's growth. Let's be serious: Impact delivered a main event with the most star-power it could possibly muster: All five members of the Main Event Mafia vs. Mick Foley, Jeff Jarrett, Daniels, A.J. Styles, and Samoa Joe. ECW featured Jack Swagger and Mark Henry vs. Christian and Tommy Dreamer. If TNA couldn't win a ratings war on those terms, then it would be a sad commentary indeed. In light of recent developments, doesn't Christian feel a tinge of regret about jumping from TNA back to WWE?



# win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

**P**EOPLE THINK I'M crazy for owning a 1979 Lincoln Continental. Of course, I have a more fuel-efficient car for everyday use, which is a good thing considering the price of gasoline these days. It's hard to believe that gas was only 85 cents a gallon when my midnight-blue behemoth came off the assembly line. The interior is still immaculate, but the cracks in the vinyl top and the rust spots on the original engine show the wear and tear of three decades.

To me, my "Hot-Rod Lincoln" is more than a car. It's a time machine. No CD player for this baby—only eight-track tapes for its

state-of-the-art-at-the-time digital stereo system. Lighted ashtrays for the backseat so even the kids can smoke in luxury.

This reminds me of a match pitting Robert Fuller and Ted DiBiase against The Fabulous Freebirds. Fuller put up his '79 Lincoln against The Freebirds' Georgia tag team title, and lost his car in the deal. Fuller looked as if he could cry. I understand why.

Times have changed since 1979. John Wayne and Mr. Ed left the world that year. Samoa Joe and Carlito were born into it. And, as you already know, 1979 is the year *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* came into existence.

If only I could jump in that Lincoln, pop in some Moody Blues, and take a trip to Freeport, Long Island, during the summer of '79 when the staff at G.C. London was preparing to launch the magazine that would revolutionize wrestling journalism. I'd see Robert J. Thornton, Gary Morgenstein, Randy Gordon, and Matt Brock debating the official wrestling ratings or playing a round of poker. I'd see Dan Shocket clunking away at his Remington in an explosive exhibition of writing virtuosity. I'd see Bill Apter with his head in the file drawer labeled "Girl Wrestlers." And I'd probably see Editor-in-Chief Peter King reading a resume and scratching his head, wondering if he

should take a chance on a kid named Stuart M. Saks.

Yet I would have particular interest in meeting a young Steve Farhood. He abandoned his wrestling columns in 1983 to focus on London's boxing magazines, eventually becoming editor-in-chief of *KO Magazine* and *The Ring*. But he just happened to write my favorite *PWI* column of all-time. The original writer of "On Assignment," Farhood related the story of drinking himself to sleep in a hotel bar in Minneapolis and dreaming he had gone to heaven. There, he saw Killer Khan as St. Peter, Harley Race as the grease-stained owner of Heaven's Bar & Grill, Capt. Lou Albano running around in a tutu, and Dino Bravo wearing Indian makeup and a ski cap. It was a hilarious, surrealistic tale.

I finally decided to have that conversation with Farhood. He isn't a hard man to find. In fact, he has become one of boxing's most visible historians and analysts, primarily for Showtime's boxing series *ShoBox*. I reminded him that we were approaching *PWI*'s 30th anniversary.

"Boy, that makes me feel old," said Farhood. "I was just a rookie reporter back then. It's funny that you mention that dream. I hadn't paid serious attention to wrestling in almost 25 years—until I watched *Raw* the other night. It was like Rip Van Winkle fell asleep in the cheap seats at the Garden and woke up years later ... only to find out there are no cheap seats at the Garden anymore. It's unbelievable that you called me. I was so curious after watching *Raw* the other night that I watched *Smackdown* and that other show—*Impact*—later in the week. I even did some Internet research. I've got so much to ask you."

This was terrific. I'd be able to have a deep conversation with someone I had long respected. And the great twist was that he was asking *me* the questions. I had juiced up Farhood's journalistic instincts and he was anxious to learn



Whether he knows it or not, Showtime boxing analyst and former *PWI* editor Steve Farhood made an indelible impression on Senior Writer Harry Burkett with one of his "On Assignment" columns.





Yes, Steve, that was Foley in the front row at MSG that night. But these days, Foley's more than merely a fan.

about all the changes in wrestling over the years.

Actually, I can spare you some details because knowledgeable readers of *PWI* would already know the answers to all of Farhood's questions. But his questions are actually very informative, demonstrating how much the business has changed since Farhood was "on assignment." Here are Farhood's questions regarding ...

**WWE:** Why did the WWF change its name to World Wrestling Entertainment? Did they add juggling and tap dancing to the cards? When did *Tuesday Night Titans* become *Monday Night Raw*? Championship Wrestling and All-Star Wrestling didn't have separate stables of wrestlers, so why do Raw and Smackdown? Why don't they introduce the ringside doctor or mention the state athletic commission

anymore? Do the wrestlers still call Vince McMahon "Chicken Lips"? Has Ric Flair taken a vacation since the early-'80s? If I'm watching wrestling, why doesn't anyone ever say the word "wrestling"?

**TNA:** It's called Total Nonstop Action? Is there a word missing? Since they always called Afa's son "Samoa #3," does that mean Samoa Joe is technically "Samoa #4"? When did Jim Cornette realize he was a lousy photographer and get a job with this organization? Didn't I see that Foley guy sitting in the front row at MSG? Isn't Lauren a lot prettier than Gene Okerlund? Why wasn't anybody in that X division match disqualified for dumping opponents over the top rope? Why did they make Rudy Charles the senior referee? He didn't even check the bottom of Sting's boots before the match!

**Assorted topics:** Did Ted DiBiase have a massive facelift? Doesn't Jay Lethal sound just like Angelo Poffo's son? Does absolutely everybody get entrance music? Why do the referees wear earpieces? Considering Blue Demon Jr. is the NWA champion, he's ranked above those other world champions, right? Speaking of which, who does *PWI* recognize as world champions? Do world champions have to wrestle both scientific wrestlers and rulebreakers?

**Uh.** I didn't want to go into that briar patch with Farhood. He'd never understand the difference between the World title and the WWE title. And, quite frankly, sometimes I don't either.

All of a sudden, Farhood asked, "Does Harley Race still run Heaven's Bar & Grill?" It was like a fog had come over me ... jhlk;fj/n.fgjh?lkj;?lhkdkjlh?doi?noptjfhnbti ... *Whoa!* What the heck is my head doing on my keyboard? Must've drifted off. I had this bizarre dream that I talked to Steve Farhood about how wrestling had changed. I don't think Farhood even watches wrestling anymore.

I have to go. It's time to put gas in the Lincoln again. □



# the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Now that Foley and Jarrett are at each other's throats in TNA, memories of their long history have transformed an affable majority shareholder into a bloodthirsty brawler.

**W**HEN YOU GET paid to have an opinion about pro wrestling, it can be easy to get caught up in all the negatives associated with the business. Too often, wrestling fans are force-fed insulting storylines that make us embarrassed to admit we're fans. In fact, very few industries have as little knowledge about what its core audience truly wants than wrestling does. After all, if WWE and TNA were truly giving the fans what they wanted, why has wrestling's television viewing audience decreased by more than 50 percent over the past decade?

This column isn't an appeal to wrestling promoters to hire marketing firms to get a handle on what their fans want (though they really should). Actually, this column is about one of the best storylines in recent months, and it's one that's not garnering overwhelming attention.

Jeff Jarrett vs. Mick Foley has the potential to be 2009's Feud of the Year. This is the most intriguing and intelligent feud the wrestling business has seen since Jericho vs. Michaels.

What makes this feud so compelling to me is that Foley and Jarrett took very different paths to the top of the wrestling world. Jarrett was born into the wrestling business. The son of Nashville promoter Jerry Jarrett, Jeff literally grew up in wrestling rings. He was around wrestlers all his life. He learned how to run the ropes, how to tape his wrists, and how to safely throw a dropkick when other kids his age were trying to get paper routes. When he was 18 years old, he was hired as a referee for his father's Continental Wrestling Association.

Less than two years after making his pro debut, Jarrett was teaming with Jerry Lawler and was soon touring Puerto Rico and Japan. Literally, he was Jerry's fair-haired boy, the heir apparent to the Nashville territory and the protégé of "The King."

Roughly 955 miles away, Mick Foley was graduating from Ward Melville High School in East Setauket, Long Island. A long-time wrestling fan, Foley wrestled and played lacrosse in high school, but was pudgy



and not particularly athletic. As a student at SUNY Cortland, he hitchhiked to Madison Square Garden to see his hero, Jimmy Snuka, face Don Muraco. A short time later, he enrolled in Dominic DeNucci's wrestling school in Pennsylvania.

Foley would drive 13 hours round-trip between college and DeNucci's school. He slept in his car because he couldn't afford a hotel room. He wasn't the strongest or most athletic student in his class, and was frequently singled out to be a practice dummy for the other students. He took beatings, and came home bruised and sore. There were days when it hurt to get out of bed, but he kept at it because he dreamt of one day making it to Madison Square Garden as a wrestler.

In 1988, Foley and Jarrett crossed paths for the first time. Foley came into the CWA as Cactus Jack, the brawling sociopath. Foley won championship gold with partner Gary Young, but they dropped the tag belts two weeks later. Just a few months after that, the journeyman Foley packed his bags for the World Class territory, hoping he would catch his break there.

As for Jarrett, he would go on to become the shining star of the area. Jerry would eventually buy World Class and merge it with the CWA to create the USWA, and Jeff would hold the USWA heavyweight title 10 times.

By 1993, Jeff had been hired by the WWF, where he went on to win the Intercontinental title. Foley bounced around the indies before winding up in WCW, where he lost his ear. A run of Japan's garbage circuit ensued. Foley amassed scar tissue up and down his body. After tak-

ing beating after beating for a decade, Foley finally arrived in the WWF as Mankind.

Parallel paths leading to the same destination, right? Not quite.

Most likely, Foley has never forgotten how Jarrett was handpicked for stardom while he had to claw and scratch like a rabid animal for everything he ever got. Jeff had the beautiful blond hair, the good physique, and plenty of female admirers. Foley was a deformed freak, a glorified carnival act that only made it to the top because he didn't feel pain.

Oh, Foley felt pain. And, on the May 14 episode of *Impact*, Foley let that pain erupt.

While Jarrett was guiding a camera crew through the old TNA Asylum in Nashville, Foley jumped Jarrett and administered a sick, ugly beating to him. Any image of Foley as the smiling "Mrs. Foley's Baby Boy" instantly crumbled, and you sudden-

ly remembered the savagery Foley was capable of.

"I always hated your old man," Foley screeched. "This is where I starved, Jeff."

Twenty-one years ago, Foley fought for a roster spot as Jarrett was groomed for superstardom. Foley endured many beatings for \$25 payouts. Jarrett got pointers from Lawler.

Foley never forgot the resentment and jealousy he felt back in those days. And he managed to ingratiate himself to Jarrett, gain a position of authority in TNA, and win the TNA World title before he went after Jarrett for revenge. It's cold-blooded, psychotic, and disturbing. In other words, it's vintage Cactus Jack.

These days, it's rare to find a feud that lasts more than a few months. This one has been simmering for more than 20 years, and it promises to be one for the ages. □



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Senior Writer Dan Murphy says a return of the "vintage" Cactus Jack could make the Foley-Jarrett conflagration 2009's Feud of the Year.



# the trade's mark

By Frank Ingiosi

**T**HE FUNNY THING—if anything regarding this situation could ever be considered “funny”—is that I know better than to think or feel the way I do. I’m trained to divorce

emotion from logic, to separate justice from vengeance.

Still, am I alone in thinking that the 10-year sentence handed down to Phil Astin—the doctor who illegally

prescribed painkillers and other assorted drugs to Chris Benoit, among others—was light?

Of course, my head tells me that given the way the system works—as well as what Astin pleaded guilty to—10 years is probably an adequate sentence. Sure, that’s what my head says, but, unfortunately, I can’t get rid of that pit in my stomach that forces me to think this just isn’t right.

Looking at the facts as stipulated, even the most fervent of doubters can see just why the Astin situation played out as it did. History is littered with situations very similar to this where, for better or worse, the villain gets it in the end, but just not for what you expected. Al Capone spent his remaining days in federal lockdown after a tax evasion conviction and O.J. Simpson is in prison for armed robbery and not for making *The Naked Gun 33 1/3*, which should have been a convictable offense.

The crimes with which Astin was charged are both lengthy and complicated, so let’s just break it down from a numbers perspective in order to keep you reading and to keep the lawyer switch in my brain in the “neutral” position.

Astin was charged in a 175-count federal criminal indictment with illegally distributing prescription drugs to 19 patients. The identities of those patients were withheld from official court documents, which limited identification to initials. However, the common belief among analysts was that the patient referred to as “C.B.” in court documents was likely Chris Benoit.

According to the prosecutors who represented the state in the Northern District of Georgia, an 11- to 13-year sentence is the recommended punishment for the illegal distribution of prescription drugs. Further, of the 175-counts, more than 50 carried a maximum sentence of 20 years and \$1-million in fines if one is convicted individually for those offenses.

Simply looking at the numbers actually makes me feel worse about what transpired. With an apparent wealth of evidence—at least enough



Images of Chris Benoit and his wife Nancy in happier times cause some fans, including Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi, to question whether or not the 10-year sentence handed to Dr. Phil Astin for illegally supplying drugs to Benoit and others fits the crime.





Chris Benoit and his family were hardly the only ones affected by Astin's illegal activities. Vince McMahon and pro wrestling in general drew much scrutiny in the wake of Benoit's death.

to pin 175 different counts of criminal behavior on the guy—where does a 10-year sentence come from? Hell, if he was hit with any one of the 20-year sentences, it may, *may*, feel a little more like justice was served. But, of course, this is the point where my brain kicks back in and lets the rest of me know that there is more to this situation than I would like to admit.

See, regardless of the conflicting reports and medical opinions, I *want* to believe that were it not for Astin keeping Benoit knee-deep in illegally distributed prescription drugs, the horrific events of June 22, 2007, would never have occurred. I *want* to believe that. But can I believe that? Honestly, no I cannot. Not given the lack of definitive evidence. As much as you and I would like to believe that there was some greater, outside force pushing Benoit into committing the atrocities he did, the reality is that whatever Astin provided the man was not capable—on its own—of doing such.

It is well recognized and admitted that Chris Benoit suffered from brain damage likely for much of his adult life, thanks to his chosen profession and the gusto with which he ap-

proached it—autopsy results in 2007 showed as much. However, in the medical examiner's official report, there was no definitive opinion that the years of drug abuse by Benoit—drugs, allegedly supplied by Astin—caused the damage or could be considered the proximate cause of his role in the deaths of his wife, son, and self. The circumstances, and perhaps better judgment, pointed to a connection, yet the science could not. The link, although suspected, was impossible to substantiate.

Further, my brain continued badgering me by pointing out that the U.S. justice system is evidence-based, and without proof you are then left to attempt to convict

on the circumstances, which is rarely successful and completely ill-advised when you have a virtual armory of smoking guns already. I may have forgotten much of what I learned in law school, but I do recall that there's no point pursuing other avenues when you have what amounts to a legal slam-dunk.

The hard truth is that the government had Astin in its sights, but just not for what wrestling fans would have hoped he received. Again, I'm a relatively bright adult and even I am having a hard time separating what should happen from what did happen. I know justice was served, but it's just not the justice we wanted. Of course, this is why we have a legal system—as far as I'm concerned, the best one at that—in the first place. There is no place for angry, emotional decisions in law.

In the end, a criminal is going away for 10 years and will never have the level of access or responsibility he once abused to destroy so many lives. In that regard there should be some level of closure on the entire situation after two years. But as a fan, the more I read about Astin and the sentencing, the fresher the wounds feel. □

# DON'T MISS

“THE TURN”

WITH

## FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON:

[pwi-online.com](http://pwi-online.com)

**Ingiosi On The Michaels-Jericho Feud:** “While watching both sure-fire Hall of Famers spew hatred toward each other on Monday night, I couldn't help but wonder: *Just how good will this be when all is said and done?* We are being treated to two of professional wrestling's greatest showmen and talkers going head-to-head in a series of thinly veiled personal attacks on each other. The seeds of the feud were planted months ago and, unlike most of what WWE puts on television, they were allowed to take root and grow.”

**Ingiosi On Paul Burchill:** “Wow, Burchill went from goofy pirate, to OVW, to creepy sister-lover, to mid-card guy who used to be a pirate and creepy sister-lover in no time flat. Plus, making your debut during the down week of ECW is like getting traded from the Kansas City Royals to the Japanese equivalent of the Kansas City Royals, and no one notices.”

**Ingiosi On Vladimir Kozlov:** “The involvement of Vladimir Kozlov—or, as we'll call him, ‘Russian Khali’—following the match sort of doused the excitement. Of course, we understand that Russian Khali is apparently going to be a big part of the Smackdown main event picture. And, yes, it makes sense to introduce him right away, especially as a part of such a big night. But, still ... why? Seriously, why? The man uses a headbutt for God's sake. We don't get it but, hey, we're not Freddy Prinze Jr.”

**Ingiosi On MEM:** “No doubt it will be the collective egos of this group that eventually tear it apart from the inside. Still, we should enjoy the ride while we're on it. This should be the golden age of TNA. If this group were in WWE, it would be considered one of the ‘greatest in wrestling history.’ Yet, while it is the main angle of *Impact*, it still doesn't feel as if the Main Event Mafia has grabbed its rightful place in wrestling history just yet.”



You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just have to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd never think of asking

# 12 questions

**Shawn Spears**

**1**

**You're a hockey fan: Should fighting be eliminated from the sport entirely, or are you a proponent of the old-school, tough-guy style?**

Hell no, fighting shouldn't be eliminated from hockey! It's been apart of the sport since Day One. If you didn't have tough guys such as myself around, then all the fans of the world wouldn't be able to be entertained by [Sidney] Crosby, [Alexander] Ovechkin, and other stars because they would be smashed into oblivion day in and day out.

**2**

**As a former tag partner of Cody Rhodes, do you have any words of wisdom to share for Ted DiBiase Jr.?**

I happen to know both Cody and Ted DiBiase Jr. very well. Both are very talented athletes, which is exactly why Randy Orton chose them as part of Legacy. I have known Cody much longer and know how passionate he is about the business and what drives him. In the time I've known DiBiase, I have seen some of the same traits. My message is: You both have a great thing going—don't get silly and rock the boat! Especially you, Ted.

**3**

**Who's the coolest "Gavin": Lead singer of the band Bush, Gavin Rossdale, singer/songwriter Gavin DeGraw, or *Rescue Me* character Tommy Gavin?**

You should be ashamed of yourself for asking that. You didn't include that guy who was in ECW a while back, I believe his name was ... Gavin Spears.

**4**

**Which do you prefer: *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*?**

By looking so intrigued when asking that question, I'll assume you've never had relations with a woman.

**5**

**Which actor from *The Wrestler* impressed you the most: Mickey Rourke or Marisa Tomei?**

Marisa Tomei, a stage, pole, and half naked ... Impressive. 'Nuff said.

**6**

**What's the last book you read?**

I read *The Secret*, written by many doctors and psychiatrists. I didn't read it for personal reasons, but because the experts wanted me to read it and give them my feedback and opinions. Canadians are quite educated.

**7**

**How do you think Bruno Sammartino would have fared in OVW or FCW?**

Bruno is a legend, but he wouldn't have lasted a week in OVW or FCW, if Shawn Spears were there. He

would've gotten halfway up the mountain before I trapped that big ugly bear, smacked him, and sent him back down with his tail tucked between his American legs.

**8**

**What was your greatest memory from your ECW stint?**

My fondest memories on ECW pale in comparison to the monumental memories I gave the WWE Universe.

**9**

**Your friends drag you onstage and force you to sing karaoke. What song do you rock?**

"Wanted Dead Or Alive" by Bon Jovi. I'd bring that back like the next coming of Christ!

**10**

**If you could recommend any independent wrestler for the ECW "New Talent Initiative," who would you recommend?**

I would've said Cody Deaner, but TNA did the wise thing by scooping him up. There is a ton of talent I would recommend for the "NTI": Tyson Dux, T.J. Harley, Derek Wyld, Roderick Strong, the list goes on and on.

**11**

**What part of your workout routine do you dread doing the most?**

The only thing I dread about some gyms is that they don't have enough mirrors. I like mirrors, but they love me.

**12**

**You're on a sinking ship with fellow Ontarians Eric Young, Cody Deaner, and Kizarny. There's only room for three people on the lifeboat. Who doesn't make the cut and why?**

Well, since I would clearly be the captain, Kizarny wouldn't be allowed on my ship. Reason being, he's weird. I'm not scared of anything, but he makes me cringe a little. □









**EL CANEK**

**F**EW WRESTLERS CAN boast that they've bodyslammed Andre the Giant. Fewer still can say they slammed both Andre and Yokozuna during their career. And only one can say he bodyslammed both of those behemoths and collected wins over Hulk Hogan, Lou Thesz, and Big Van Vader.

That man is El Canek.

El Canek is one of the most accomplished heavyweights in Mexican wrestling history. He made his pro debut in 1972 at the age of 18 and competed as El Universitario ("The College Student") and Principe Azul ("Prince Charming"). The following year, he changed his name to El Canek, a tribute to 18th century Mayan revolutionary Jacinto Canek, a cultural hero of Mexico.

Canek captured his first major title in 1978 with a win over CMLL's national light heavyweight cham-

pion Dr. Wagner. He would hold the title for more than six months before falling to Dos Caras.

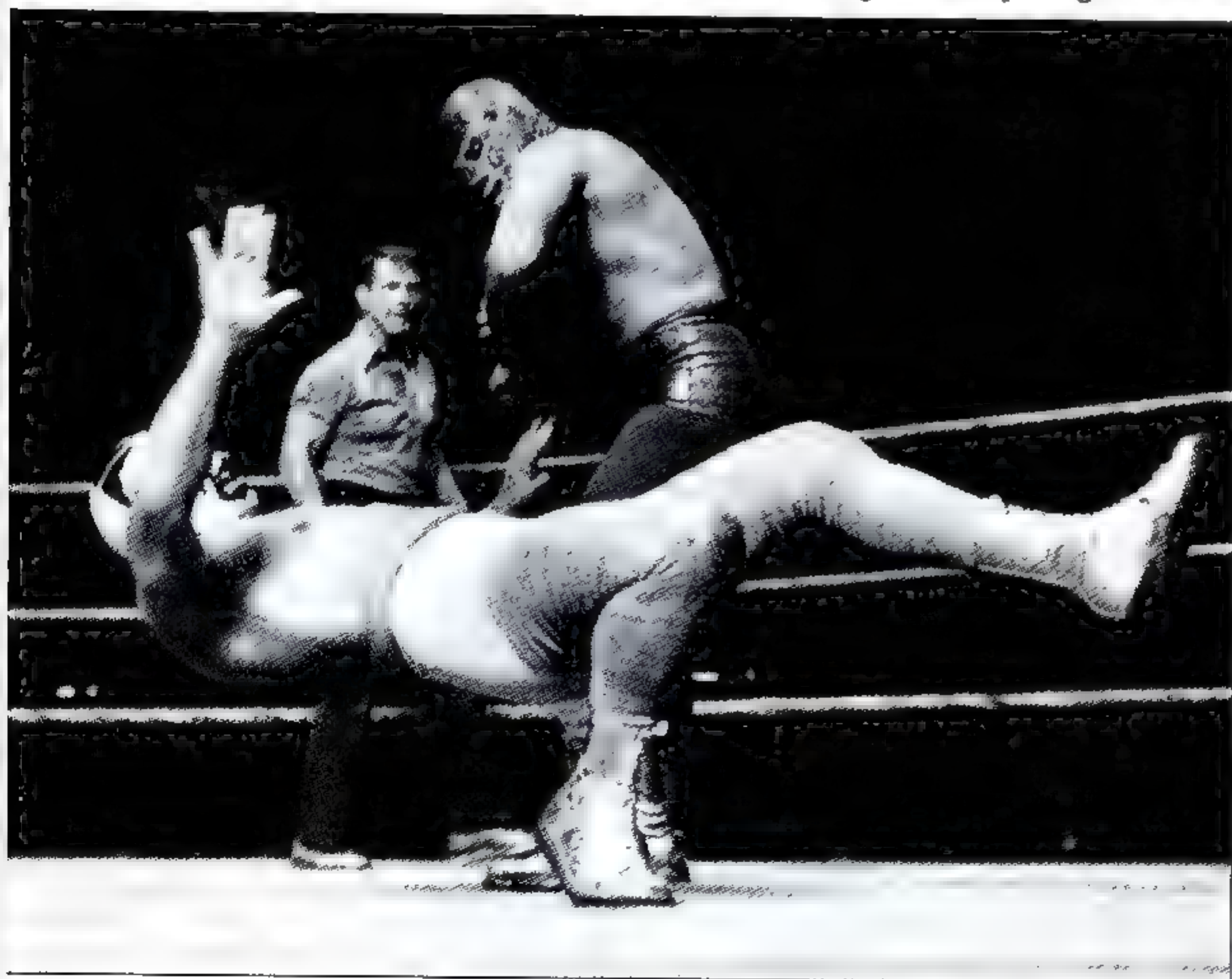
In September 1978, Canek scored the win that catapulted him into international superstardom, beating the legendary Lou Thesz for the UWA heavyweight title. Thesz was 62 years old at the time, but was still widely considered to be the greatest wrestler in the world by Mexican fans, and his loss to Canek established "The Mayan Prince" as the top draw in the country.

Canek would go on to hold that prestigious championship 15 times throughout his career and would establish himself as one of Mexico's most dominant competitors throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Standing 6' and weighing 240 pounds, Canek enjoyed a size advantage over most of his lucha libre contemporaries and routinely faced the larger foreign competitors when they toured Mexico. He utilized his power with his signature finishing move, a gorilla press slam.

Thanks to a working agreement between UWA and New Japan Pro Wrestling, Canek made several successful tours of Japan, where he took on the likes of Tatsumi Fujinami and the original Tiger Mask.

Canek collected victories over Hogan, Andre the Giant, Fujinami, and dozens of other international competitors, as well as many Mexican greats. About the only Mexican star he was unable to defeat was Mil



Canek dips a shoulder into the great Mascaras. Their feud in the '80s helped popularize the lucha style around the globe. Unfortunately for Canek, he's never beaten "The Man Of 1,000 Masks."

*The Wrestling Observer*

# Hall of Fame

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame





U.S. fans rarely got a glimpse of Canek because he toured America so infrequently, but Mexican fans and wrestlers alike, such as Atlantis, considered him the face of lucha libre.

Mascaras. The two top Mexican stars of the 1980s had a series of classic bouts, but Mascaras always managed to come out on top.

When the Universal Wrestling Association ceased operations in 1995, Canek continued to defend the championship until finally losing it once and for all to Dr. Wagner Jr. in 2004.

Besides defending his UWA championship, Canek frequently defended his trademark mask, putting it on the line against more than a dozen challengers through the years. In a match of particular interest to American fans, Canek defeated "The Blue Blazer" Owen Hart in a mask-vs.-mask match in 1991, forcing Hart to remove his hood, the most humbling of all defeats for a luchador.

Canek was also one of the first wrestlers to make the transition to mixed martial arts. In 2006, Canek defeated Osamu Tachihikari in a *vale tudo* contest in Japan.

Unfortunately, Canek rarely toured the United States and rarely received attention from American fans, causing his exploits and wins to go largely unnoticed in the U.S.

Ironically, of all the luchadores of the 1980s and 1990s, El Canek had the most "Americanized" style, mixing power moves with grappling and a few big aerial moves, as opposed to the high-flying and gymnastics associated with most other luchadores during that era.

In 2002, Canek won AAA's Rey de Reyes (King of Kings) tournament. He's reigned as IWRG Intercontinental champion since 2006, but defends the title only periodically. He also held the CMLL tag title with Dr. Wagner Jr. and the CMLL trios title with Black Warrior and Rayo de Jalisco Jr.

Currently, Canek is semi-retired, but periodically dons the mask and boots to compete. He even squared off against perennial rival Mascaras earlier this year (yet another loss).

Along with Mascaras, Canek was the face of lucha libre for more than two decades, and helped popularize the lucha style in Japan while scoring decisive victories over the biggest international talent in wrestling history.

He is a charter member of *The Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame*. □

# PWI TURNS 25!

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED



*Pro Wrestling Illustrated* recently celebrated its 25th year as the sport's number-one publication in a very special way. Those who subscribe to *PWI* or spotted it at the newsstand in time got a treat. Not only did *PWI* produce a silver anniversary special, but as an added bonus, we poly-bagged a re-print of our very first issue, from 1979!

If you missed it, you won't have to wait 25 more years for a follow-up. A limited amount of both issues are still available!

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before it really is too late!

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7035/09-07



# independent roundup

By Al Alven

**C**ONTROVERSY HAS reared its ugly head in the International Wrestling Cartel, marring the company's signature event and ruining what should have been the defining moment of **Super Hentai's** career.

Moments after Hentai defeated **Justin Idol** in the final of the Super Indy VIII tournament to become its first ever two-time winner, promoter **Norm Connors** voided the decision. Connors claimed that **Johnny Gargano**, who held the Super Indy title for a brief period last fall before forfeiting it due to

injury, was the rightful champion.

This lead to an impromptu attack by Gargano on Hentai's ankle, which had previously been injured in his semifinal win over **Sami Callihan**. Eventually, **John McChesney** made the save, running off Connors and Gargano, and allowing Hentai to celebrate briefly with the now-disputed Super Indy belt before seeking medical attention.

Hentai, who won the inaugural Super Indy tournament in 2002, defeating **C.M. Punk** and **Christopher Daniels** in the process, also scored a big win in the opening round of this year's tournament by beating former WWE star **Elijah Burke**.

It is not yet known how much time, if any, Hentai will miss while his ankle heals. Whenever he returns, a showdown with Gargano is a forgone conclusion.

"**Big**" **Kevin Northcutt** did more than live up to a promise when he defeated **Spoiler 2000** on May 2 in Tyler, Texas, to regain his Texas heavyweight title. With his ninth reign, he surpasses **David Von Erich** to become the third all-time winningest Texas champion in history. He now trails only **Miguel Guzman** (10 reigns) and **Pepper Gomez** (14 reigns).

"I worked hard to get back into great condition. It paid off, and once again, the belt is back where it belongs," said Northcutt.

**The Colony—Fire Ant** and **Soldier Ant**—scored a huge win in their war over **Team F.I.S.T.** at CHIKARA's Aniversario Yang event at The Arena in Philadelphia on May 24. The popular insects put their masks on the line for an opportunity to shave the heads of **Icarus** and **Chuck Taylor**, and came out on top.

Fans in attendance delighted in seeing Taylor humiliated, particularly because he was responsible for ending the career of the Colony's third member, **Worker Ant**, at the 2009 King of Trios tournament. Icarus lost his hair for the second time in his career, having been shaved by **Jigsaw** in 2006.

While the humiliation endured by Icarus and Taylor will most likely ensure that this feud will continue for some time, the Colony is now hoping to focus on wrestling CHIKARA's tag team title away from the **Osirian Portal—Ophidian** and **Amasis**. They have also debuted a new partner, **Greet Ant**, to replace the fallen Worker Ant and help watch their backs.

It's hard to believe that 18 years have passed since **Jerry Lynn** and **Sean Waltman** burst onto the national scene with their feud over the Global Wrestling Federation's light heavyweight title. Waltman, then known as the **Lightning Kid**, defeated Lynn in a tournament final to win the inaugural championship in the summer of 1991. Lynn defeated Waltman for the belt in December of that year before heading to the WWF.

Nearly two decades later, the bad blood that once fueled the rivalry still exists. Lynn and Waltman are set to renew acquaint-



Photo by Steve Hey

"**Big**" Kevin Northcutt has been a mainstay in the Texas indies. With his most recent title win, he is now on pace to become the winningest champion in the state's history.





With Greet Ant on board, Fire and Soldier Ant have committed to avenging their fallen partner, Worker Ant. Icarus and Chuck Taylor were the Colony's first victims.

tances in their native Minnesota for FIRST Wrestling.

"We came up through the ranks together, toured Japan together, battled it out in Global," reminisced Lynn, the current Ring of Honor champion. "We pushed each other hard in those early days and helped shape each other's careers. I'm looking forward to getting back in the ring with Sean and proving that I am the better man."

Not surprisingly, Waltman's retort had a different tone: "Oh, please. Jerry is delusional. Look at the career I've had—success in WWE, WCW, TNA, Mexico, anywhere I went. I was a member of the NWO and D-X. I've won titles all around the world. He's still living off our feud from years ago in Global. It'll be my pleasure to finally put him out of his misery."

IT'S COMING!

THE

TOP 500

RANKING THE TOP 500 STARS IN WRESTLING

ONLY IN

Pro Wrestling

ILLUSTRATED

ON SALE AUGUST 18!

THIS ISSUE IS ALWAYS A NEWSSTAND SELL-OUT. GET YOURS EARLY!

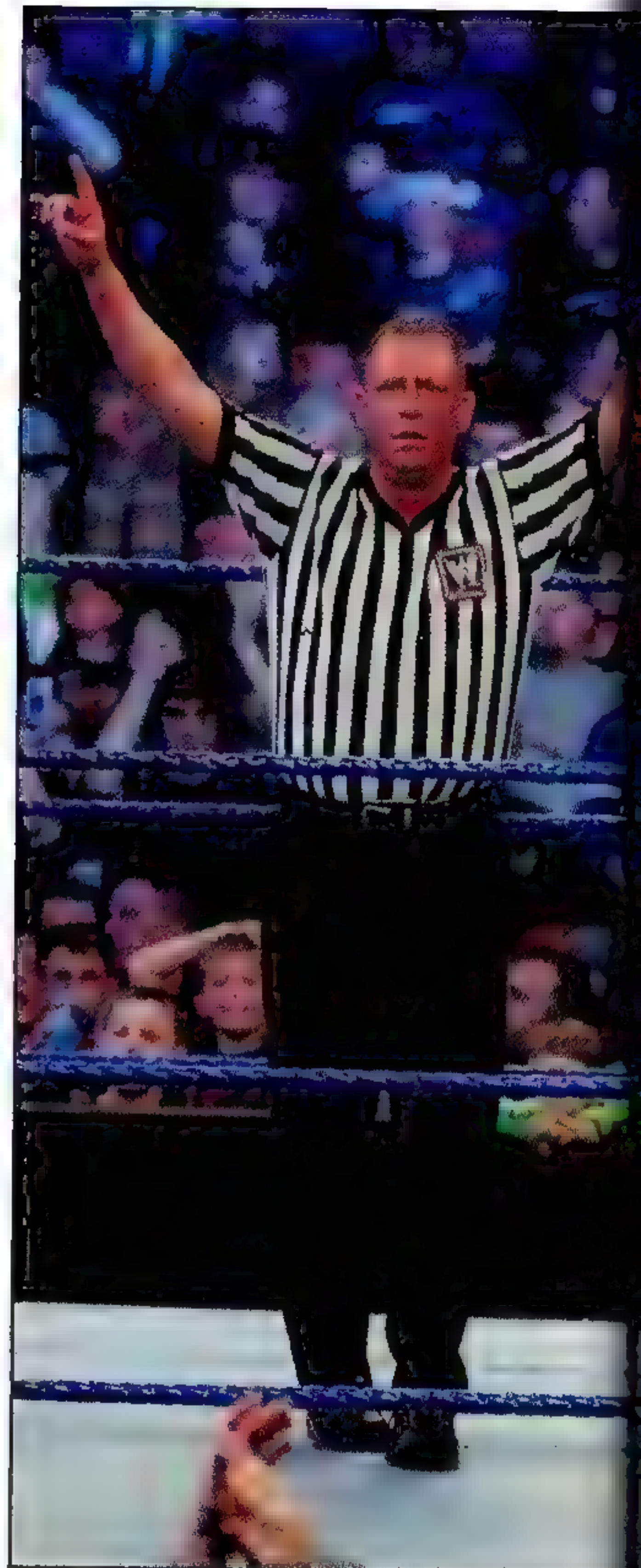




ROH champion Jerry Lynn and former Global Wrestling Federation adversary Sean "X-Pac" Waltman will soon be re-igniting old hostilities in Minnesota's FIRST Wrestling promotion.

For years, wrestling in the St. Louis area was synonymous with the legendary *Wrestling At The Chase* program, which aired from

the Chase Park Plaza Hotel and featured countless stars. From **An-dre the Giant** to **Fritz Von Erich**, **Dick the Bruiser** to **Bruiser Brody**,



and so many in between, the program showcased the city's mat heritage and introduced countless fans in the Midwest to the sport.

On May 23—the 50th anniversary of the program's debut on KPLR-TV—local promoter **Herb Simmons** saluted *Wrestling At The Chase* with a ceremony that featured **Harley Race**, perhaps the most popular wrestler in St. Louis history, **Larry Matysik**, a former promoter and play-by-play man, and **Mickey Garagiola**, the brother of former St. Louis Cardinal **Joe Garagiola** and ring announcer at the Chase from 1969 until the final broadcast on September 10, 1983.





Kizarny's time in WWE was brief, but the "Circus Freak" recently resurfaced in Border City Wrestling, where he has targeted champion Tyson Dux.

Photo by George Napolitano

If you blinked, you may have missed **Kizarny's** brief stint as a member of WWE's Smackdown roster earlier this year. The bizarre "Carnival Freak" recently resurfaced in Border City Wrestling, where he is reportedly aiming to take out BCW heavyweight champion **Tyson Dux**.

With fellow former WWE performers **The Highlanders**, **Robbie** and **Rory McAllister**, also in line for a shot and TNA talent **Rhino** and **Shark Boy** signed for future events, Dux will certainly have his hands full in the coming months.

Sad news to report as indy wrestler **Tim "Tank" Robertson** passed

away on May 15 from an apparent allergic reaction to a bee sting. The Caruthersville, Missouri, native and father of two was only 29.

Prior to his passing, Robertson had entered a contest hosted by Beckett Media, which asked contestants to write a brief summary explaining why **Ric Flair** was their favorite wrestler. Fifteen winners would then be the recipients of the first certified autographed card of the "Nature Boy," a Donruss Americana promo card from Panini.

Robertson, who did not mention his profession when he sent in his entry, wound up being selected as one of the winners.

"When you sent the message that Tim won, he got so excited that he cried," wrote Robertson's wife, **Helen**, in an e-mail to Beckett shortly after his death. "He has never won anything in his life. He won something of his favorite thing, wrestling, and his favorite wrestler, Ric Flair. The only thing he was not able to do is meet him in person or watch him in a live wrestling event. You did let him win one out of these 15 cards in the world. That meant a lot to him. Again, thank you so much from my husband and me."

#### Recent Title Changes:

**Chaotic Wrestling, Lowell, MA, May 1: The Blowout Boys (Danny E. & Antonio T.)** defeated **Brian Fury & Mikaze** to win the tag team title ... **Ultimate Championship Wrestling, Cave City, KY, May 1: Sin-D** upset **Diane Von Hoffman** to win the Women's championship ... **Dynamic Wrestling Alliance, Laurel, IN, May 2: Gator Henry** pinned **Phantom** to win the Tri-State title ... **Phantom** defeated **Phoenix** to capture the heavyweight title ... **Tennessee Independent Wrestling Federation, Trenton, TN, May 9: Frankie Tucker** beat **Chris Lexxus** to win the TV/Cyberzone title ... **Panhandle Wrestling Federation, Amarillo, TX, May 16: Gabe the Babe** defeated **Cody Jones** to win the NWA-Southwest Texas junior heavyweight title ... **Generic Championship Wrestling, American Fork, UT, May 16: Howie Overlight** pinned **Wolfie** to win the hardcore title ... **Coliseum Championship Wrestling, Evansville, IN, May 20: Brandon Espinosa** defeated **Chris Thomas** to win the light heavyweight title ... **Fusion Tradition Wrestling, Sparta, TN, May 23: Michael Jablonski** beat **Jeremy Travis** to become the new heavyweight champion ... **World Wide Championship Wrestling, Penn Laird, VA, May 23: Todd Austin** pinned **Jamie Morris** to be crowned the first-ever Honor & Glory champion. □





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# the international report

by Bill Meltzer

**O**NE OF THE icons of lucha libre will be hanging up his tights for good after 33 years in the ring. **Lizmark** announced to the Mexican press that his appearance at the Luchas 2000 Anniversary show at Arena Coliseo would be his final match. At 59 years of age

and having dealt with heart problems, Lizmark said he knows that he can't compete on a top level anymore and cannot accept less. Doing so, he said, would also be cheating the fans.

The legendary grappler, nicknamed "**El Geniecillo Azur**" (The

Little Blue Genius), was originally trained to be a boxer by his uncle, but began a wrestling career instead in 1976. During the 1980s, the masked man was a headliner for EMLL, where he won the promotion's top championships multiple times, defeating the likes of **Cien Caras** and **El Satanico** for the title. In 1992, he jumped to AAA and engaged in an epic feud with **La Parka**. In announcing his retirement, Lizmark said that he now regrets jumping to AAA but felt at the time that it was the right thing to do.

Lizmark also compared the popularity of lucha libre stars to bullfighters. He said the fans of the two sports motivate the performers to levels of bravery and daring that they wouldn't be capable of on their own.

Two iconic Japanese wrestling names, **Masahiro Chono** and **Tiger Mask**, will both be making special appearances in their homeland. Chono will be appearing on a Real Japan show promoted by the original Tiger Mask, **Satoru Sayama**. His opponent had yet to be determined as of press time, but was likely to be **Ganso Tiger Mask**. The current version of Tiger Mask was slated to appear for Michinoku Pro, teaming with **Jinsei Shinzaki** and **Dick Togo**.

"**Cute**" **Kip James** was forced to cancel a scheduled independent booking for Varsity Pro Wrestling in the United Kingdom because TNA needed him at the 11th hour to make an appearance at an *Impact* television taping. James had been scheduled to wrestle a steel cage match against the **U.K. Kid**. Former longtime WWE wrestler **Bob "Hardcore" Holly** replaced him.

TNA management issued a statement of apology for pulling James off

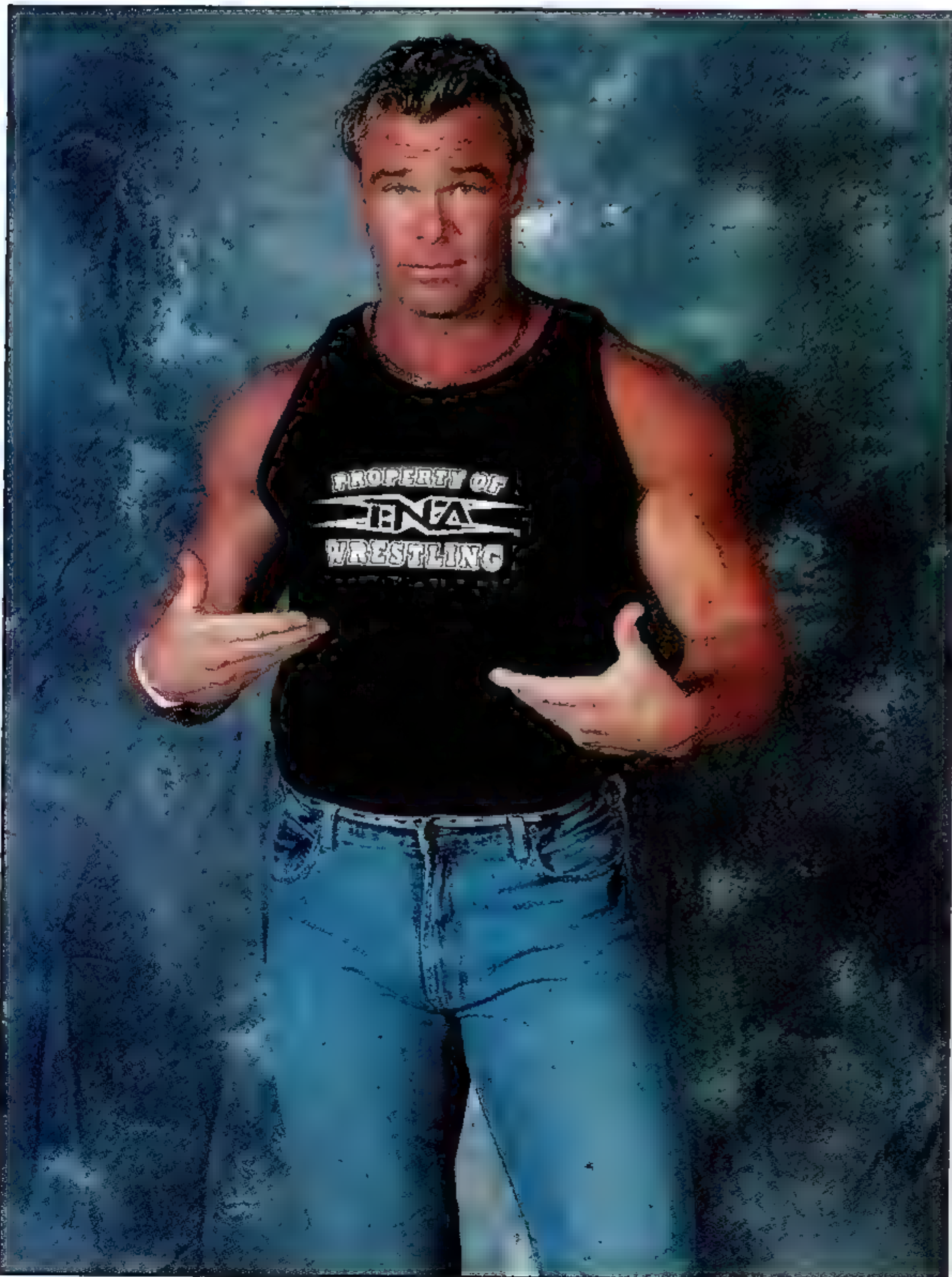


Photo by Vann Verna

Many had speculated that Kip James' time in TNA was through when the former New Age Outlaw was removed from TV tapings. But, when TNA pulled him from a recent U.K. show to appear on *Impact*, those rumors were laid to rest.



the card. In a message posted on the VPW website, the company said the change in schedule was unavoidable and "TNA TV has to be the first priority for all contracted talent."

New Japan has announced its intention to send a call out for young, fresh talent from other promotions. The federation wants to make this year's tournaments more youth-centric. The call has been answered by **Kota Ibushi**. If the young independent promotion standout impresses in trial matches, he is likely to be offered a regular spot in New Japan, much like grapplers such as **Minoru Tanaka** were in the past.

Dragon Gate star **CIMA** recently made his first appearance in nine years for New Japan. He teamed with longtime friend **Jushin "Thunder" Liger** and defeated the tag team of **Tiger Mask** and **Kanemoto**.

Efforts to revive the pro wrestling scene in South Korea have taken another blow. WWE recently lost its TV deal in the country. C.J. Media, which owns national stations XTM and TVN, had a \$6-million-per-year contract with WWE that recently expired and will not be renewed. *Raw* was broadcasted on XTM while TVN was showing *Smackdown*, ECW, and *Bottom Line*.

**Sung Min Soo**, the South Korean voiceover play-by-play announcer for WWE since the beginning in 2000, told the national press he doesn't believe any other station in South Korea is interested in airing WWE programming because it's too hard to find sponsors for wrestling broadcasts in the country.

One of the big British tabloids, *The Sun*, recently reported that **Juventud Guerrera** and **Konnan** were involved in a backstage brawl that left Guerrera with a broken nose, an injured eye, and severe bruising. The incident occurred shortly after Guerrera's return to AAA.

Guerrera allegedly found his belongings tampered with, finding human feces inside his bag. He accused Konnan of being the guilty party. Konnan vehemently denied



Photo by Vern Verna

After his passing, a memorial was held in Abismo Negro's hometown of Palomeque, Mexico. The coroner has declared the death due to accidental drowning and no further investigation is planned.

the accusation. Later, after Guerrero wrestled **Jack Evans**, Konnan and Evans confronted Guerrero physically. Guerrero alleges that Konnan held him down as Evans began throwing punches.

Japanese woman wrestler **Ayako Hamada** recently announced at a press conference that she has wrestled her final match in Japan for the time being and has elected to sign a contract to wrestle in North America for TNA. Hamada is the daughter of legendary wrestler **Gran Hamada** from Michinoku Pro Wrestling.

The lucha libre world is mourning the recent death of **Andres Palomeque Gonzalez** at age 37. Best known as **Abismo Negro** in AAA, he also wrestled as **Winners**. Under the Winners moniker, he teamed with **Super Calo** and later formed a trio with **Rey Mysterio** and his nephew **Rey Mysterio Jr.**

In 1995, Winners lost his mask in a feud with Calo. Two years later, he became Abismo Negro. He appeared at the 1997 Royal Rumble show in San Antonio that drew 60,000 fans to the Alamodome and wrestled on a few episodes of *Raw* that year.

Gonzalez' body was discovered in a Mexican river. According to statements by a bus driver who was transporting the wrestler and other passengers to Mexico City, Gonzalez became extremely agitated and demanded to be let off the bus despite it being 1:30 in the morning. After leaving the bus, Gonzalez got lost on the dark hillside, which police confirmed by a text message he sent to his wife. That was the last anyone heard of him. After receiving the text message, his wife contacted wrestling promoter **Vicente Martinez**, who organized a search party.

Our sincere condolences go out to his family and friends. □



# arena reports

We encourage promoters and readers to e-mail results to:

**PWIResults@yahoo.com**

Please try to utilize the exact format you see in the "Arena Reports." Also, please distinguish between handicap matches and three- or four-way matches. And, when reporting the result of a handicap match, indicate the number of competitors and who was the last man eliminated. Finally, please note pinfall finishes. Following these guidelines will help us greatly and make it more likely that your report will be used.

## Spotlight Card of the Month

### ILLINOIS

**ROSEMONT**—WWE Judgment Day at the Allstate Arena: Mickie James beat Beth Phoenix ... Umaga defeated C.M. Punk ... ECW champion Christian beat Jack Swagger ... John Morrison defeated Shelton Benjamin ... Intercontinental champion Rey Mysterio Jr. beat Chris Jericho ... Batista defeated WWE champion Randy Orton via DQ ... John Cena pinned The Big Show ... World champion Edge beat Jeff Hardy (5-24-09)

—Spotlight photos by George Napolitano

## UNITED STATES

### ARKANSAS

**WYNNE**—PWA at the National Guard Armory: John Cage beat Dylan Crest ... Matt Riviera pinned Chas Cardington ... Jamie Lee beat Johnny Morton via DQ ... Rik Burton defeated Chas Cardington ... Matt Riviera & Johnny Morton beat Jamie Jay & Jamie Lee to win the vacant tag team title. (5-9-09)

—Blake Cowling

### CALIFORNIA

**LOS ANGELES**—WWE Smackdown at the Staples Center: WWE champion Randy Orton defeated Batista in a steel cage match ... R-Truth & The Great Khali defeated Mike Knox & Dolph Ziggler ... Women's champion Melina defeated Alicia Fox ... John Morrison defeated Umaga by DQ ... Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas defeated Cryme Tyme (Shad Gaspard & JTG) ... Eve Torres defeated Layla El ... Edge & Chris Jericho defeated Jeff Hardy in a handicap match ... Edge defeated Jeff Hardy in a steel cage match ... John Cena defeated The Big Show in a steel cage match. (05-29-09)

—Chad Simplicio

**LOS ANGELES**—WWE Superstars at the Staples Center: Unified tag team champions Carlito & Primo Colon defeated Charlie Haas & Shelton Benjamin ... Jack Swagger defeated Finlay ... Jon Cena defeated Ted DiBiase Jr. (05-28-09)

—Stan Rodgers

**LOS ANGELES**—ECW at the Staples Center: Vladimir Kozlov beat Russ Taylor & Joey Munos in a handicap match ... Evan Bourne defeated Mark Henry via countout ... David Hart Smith, Tyson Kidd, & Jack Swagger defeated Christian & Tommy Dreamer in a handicap match. (05-26-09)

—Jason Powell

**LOS ANGELES**—WWE Raw at the Staples Center: Kelly Kelly beat Divas champion Maryse via DQ ... Kofi Kingston defeated Matt Hardy & William Regal to become the number-one contender to the U.S. championship ... Santino Marella & Mickie James beat Beth Phoenix & Chavo Guerrero Jr. in a mixed tag team match ... Goldust & Hornswoggle beat Brian Kendrick & Festus ... The Lakers (John Cena, Batista, Montel Vontavious Porter, Jerry Lawler, & Ken Kennedy) beat the Nuggets (Randy Orton, Cody Rhodes, Ted DiBiase Jr., The Big Show, & The Miz). (05-25-09)

—Chad Simplicio

**RESEDA**—Pro Wrestling Guerrilla 2009 DDT4 tag team tournament at American Legion Post #308: Round 1: Bryan Danielson & Roderick Strong defeated The

Dynasty (Joey Ryan & Scott Lost) ... Kenny Omega & Chuck Taylor defeated Scorpio Sky & Human Tornado ... Tag team champions The Young Bucks (Matt & Nick Jackson) defeated The Cutler Brothers (Dustin & Brandon) ... Semifinals: The Young Bucks defeated Kenny Omega & Chuck Taylor ... Bryan Danielson & Roderick Strong defeated The Motor City Machine Guns (Chris Sabin & Alex Shelley) ... Finals: The Young Bucks defeated Bryan Danielson & Roderick Strong to win the DDT4 tag team tournament ... Non-tournament: Phoenix Star defeated Malachai Jackson ... Heavyweight champion Chris Hero defeated Joey Ryan. (05-22-09)

—Chad Simplicio

### COLORADO

**COLORADO SPRINGS**—Asylum Championship Wrestling at the Phil Long Expo Center: Jesse Williams defeated Mitchell Carter via countout ... Cruiserweight champion Rob Ryzin pinned Kay-O in an intergender match ... Tag team champions Epic & Joshua Michael defeated Tha D-Linquentz (A. Felony & Mo Murdah) by reverse decision ... Josh Evans pinned Demont Taylor ... The Father Zane Morris

Umaga has been giving C.M. Punk so much trouble lately that their feud boiled over into Judgment Day. Punk got off a few well-placed kicks to Umaga's head, but the Samoan giant's strength proved to be too much for Punk.







Despite Swagger's best attempts at recapturing the ECW title, a determined Christian was committed to leaving the Allstate Arena as champion.

Ministry (Cam Burnquist, Jonathan Crash, Jeff Koz, & Zane Morris) defeated Kincade in a handicap elimination match ... Heavyweight champion Franco D'Angelo pinned Brandon Bishop in an Asylum Rules match. (05-23-09)

—Dustin Nichols

## FLORIDA

ORLANDO—TNA Impact at the Impact Zone: Legends champion A.J. Styles beat Daniels to qualify for the King of the Mountain match at Slammiversary ... X division champion Suicide beat Amazing Red ... Doug Williams defeated Cody Deaner in a ladder match ... Knockouts champion Angelina Love defeated Sojourner Bolt ... Jeff Jarrett defeated Eric Young to qualify for the King of the Mountain match. (05-28-09)

—Dave Young

ORLANDO—TNA Sacrifice at the Impact Zone: Amazing Red beat Kiyoshi ... Eric Young & Lethal Consequences (Jay Lethal & Consequences Creed) defeated The Motor City Machine Guns (Chris Sabin & Alex Shelley) & Sheik Abdul Bashir ... Taylor Wilde beat Daffney in a Knockouts Monster's Ball match ... X division champion Suicide vs. Daniels ended in a draw ... Knockouts champion Angelina Love beat Awesome Kong ... Samoa Joe defeated Kevin Nash ... Beer Money Inc. (Robert Roode & James

Storm) defeated The British Invasion (Brutus Magnus & Doug Williams) in the finals of the Team 3-D Invitational Tag Team Tournament ... Legends champion A.J. Styles beat Booker T in an "I Quit" match ... Sting pinned Kurt Angle in a Four-Way Ultimate Sacrifice match also involving Jeff Jarrett and Mick Foley to become the leader of the Main Event Mafia. (05-24-09)

—Dave Young

ORLANDO—TNA Impact at the Impact Zone: Suicide & Daniels beat The Motor City Machine Guns (Alex Shelley & Chris Sabin) and Lethal Consequences (Jay Lethal & Consequences Creed) in an X division three-way tag team match ... Sting beat Eric Young ... Kurt Angle defeated Matt Morgan ... Jeff Jarrett defeated Samoa Joe via DQ ... World champion Mick Foley defeated a "Rocky Balboa" cardboard cutout. (05-21-09)

—Dave Young

ORLANDO—TNA Impact at the Impact Zone: Daniels beat Chris Sabin ... Samoa Joe defeated Eric Young ... Awesome Kong beat Kip James in a stretcher match ... The British Invasion (Doug Williams & Brutus Magnus) beat Suicide & Amazing Red in a semifinal match of the Team 3-D Invitational Tag Team Tournament ... Kevin Nash beat No Limit (Naito & Yujiro) in a handicap match. (05-14-09)

—Dave Young

ORLANDO—TNA Impact at the Impact Zone: X division champion Suicide beat Consequences Creed ... Matt Morgan beat Mafia Security (Big Sal & Rocco) ... Beer Money Inc. (Robert Roode & James Storm) beat Eric Young & Jethro Holiday in a semifinal match of the Team 3-D Invitational Tag Team Tournament ... Awesome Kong beat Velvet Sky in a stretcher match ... Main Event Mafia (Kurt Angle, Sting, Scott Steiner, Kevin Nash, & Booker T) beat Mick Foley, Jeff Jarrett, Daniels, A.J. Styles, & Samoa Joe. (05-07-09)

—Dave Young

## GEORGIA

CARL—The Future Wrestling Federation at The FWF Arena: Team Famously Phenomenal defeated Alex Decker & Scott Mason ... The Midnight Rider pinned Brandon Kage ... Instant Replay (Chris Spectra & Kevin Blue) & Crazy Craig defeated Team Ego (James Boulevard, Dale Dwindle, & Kevin Ballenger) ... U.S. champion Vicious Vic Roze vs. Jason Blackman ended in a double-countout ... The American Machine defeated heavyweight champion Brian Titus via DQ ... DeMarco Knight & Rosco defeated Virge Mire & K.J. Flash ... Mortochai pinned Steve Young ... Lobo defeated

cruiserweight champion Jamie Dean via DQ ... Twisted pinned Jimmy Lee ... The Stone Mountain Wrecking Crew (T.A. Stanton & Jamie Holmes) defeated Leatherface, Rob Russo, & Zak Reilly in a handicap match. (05-22-09)

—Dale Cleveland

## IDAHO

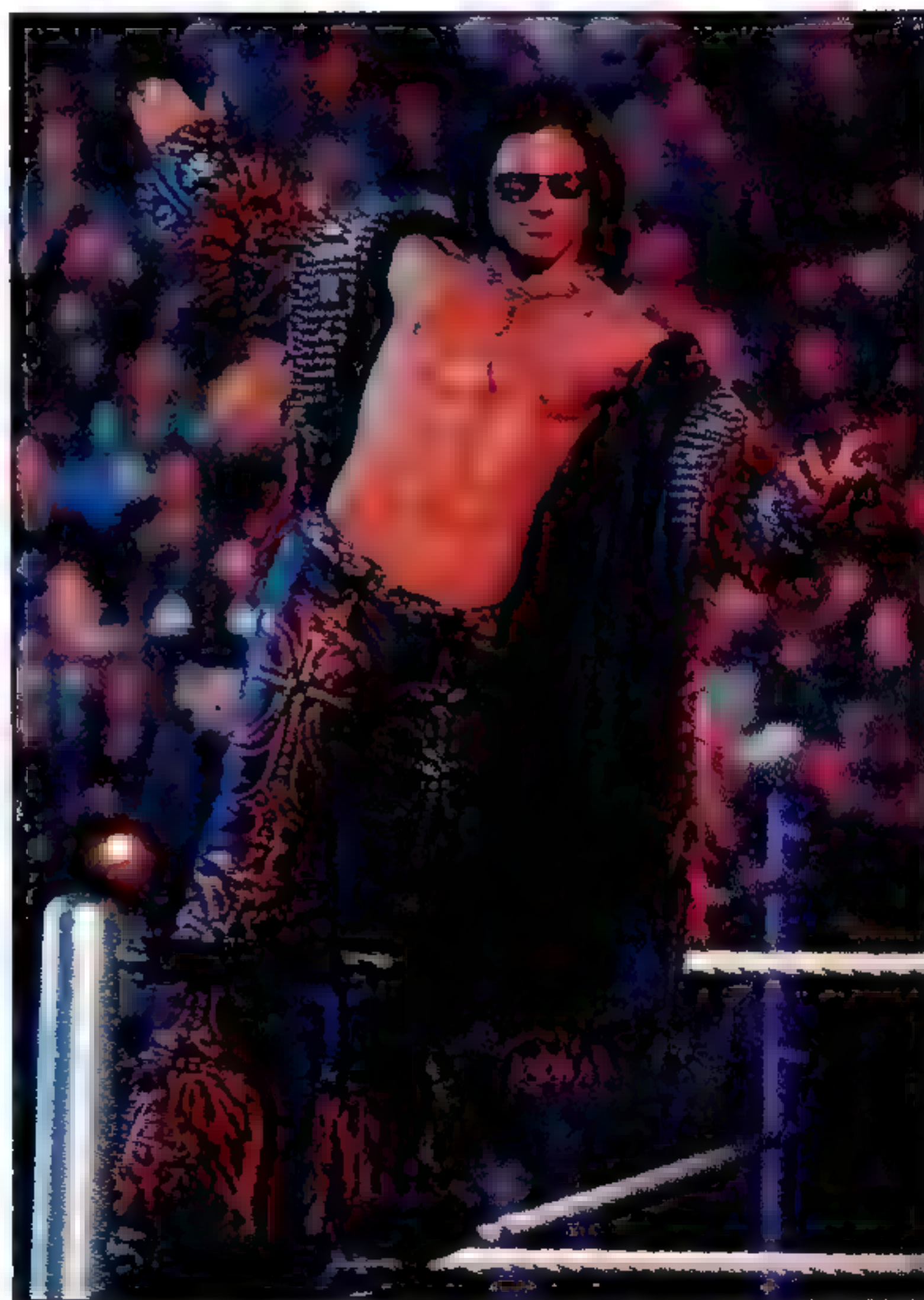
BOISE—WWE Raw at the Qwest Arena: Goldust beat Chavo Guerrero Jr. ... The Miz defeated Santino Marella ... Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Brian Kendrick ... Unified tag team champions Carlito & Primo Colon defeated Legacy (Cody Rhodes & Ted DiBiase Jr.) ... The Bella Twins (Nikki & Brie) defeated Beth Phoenix & Maryse ... U.S. champion Montel Vontavious Porter defeated Kofi Kingston and William Regal in a triple-threat match ... John Cena & Batista defeated The Big Show & Randy Orton. (05-22-09)

—Matt Hartgrave

## ILLINOIS

BLOOMINGTON—WWE super show at the U.S. Cellular Coliseum: C.M. Punk beat Shelton Benjamin ... Tyson Kidd beat Evan Bourne ... Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Jimmy Wang Yang ... Unified tag team champions Carlito & Primo Colon beat Legacy (Ted DiBiase Jr. & Cody Rhodes) via DQ ... R-Truth beat Dolph Ziggler ... The Bella Twins (Nikki & Brie) beat Beth Phoenix & Rosa Mendez ... ECW champion Christian beat Jack Swagger ... John Cena, Jeff Hardy, & Batista beat The Big Show, Edge, & Randy Orton. (05-16-09)

—Aaron Graham



John Morrison may be too cocky for some, but his dismantling of Shelton Benjamin at Judgment Day left the Rosemont, Illinois, crowd convinced he was a legitimate contender for a WWE singles title.





Try as he might, The Miz is never as cool as he thinks, but is Santino Marella really the antidote to whatever The Miz is spewing?

**OSWEGO**—Purely Obsessed Wrestling World Entertainment at the Kicker's Club: **KANO** and **Hardcore Craig** both hit the floor at the same time in the King of the Royals match, which was ruled a draw ... **M.I.A. Martinez** beat **Melanie Cruise** ... **Ruff Crossing** defeated **Great Malaki** in a best-of-three-falls match ... Tag team champions **M.O.B** defeated **The Sinmates** ... **Jimmy Blaze** pinned **Chris Cairo** to become the new heavyweight champion ... **Warm Carlos & Ramon Rodriguez** defeated **Matt Mayhem & Hardcore Craig** ... **Scott Spade** beat **KANO** in a Chicago Streetfight. (05-16-09)

—Jim Christenson

**GODFREY**—Rampage Championship Wrestling at the Sportsmen's Club: **Douglas O'Shea** defeated **Sage Ramsey** via DQ ... **Donovan Ruddick & Steven Bishop** beat **Gideon Morbid & Stevie K** ... **Dareian Frost** defeated **Teufel Hunden** via DQ ... **Li'l Evil** defeated **Lucky O'Shea** ... **Armchair Luchador** defeated **Kiwi Jello** ... **Sage Ramsey & Dareian Frost** beat tag team champions **Douglas O'Shea & Teufel Hunden** in a non-title match ... Heavyweight champion **Steve Montana** vs. **Brian James** ended in a no-contest. (05-15-09)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

**BERWYN**—SHIMMER at the Eagles Club: **Kimberly Kash** pinned **Sassy Stephie** ... **Tenille** pinned **Jetta** ... **Cat Power** defeated **Rachel Summerlyn**, **Kellie Skater**, and **Ariel** in a four-way match ... **Nikki Roxx** beat **Melanie Cruise** ... **Rain** beat **Jennifer Blake** ... **Cheerleader Melissa** pinned **Jessie McKay** ... **LuFisto** beat **Amber O'Neal** ... **Daizee Haze & Allison Danger** defeated **Portia Perez & Nicole Matthews** ... **Serena Deeb** pinned **Mercedes Martinez** ... Tag team champions **Ashley Lane & Nevaeh** beat **Sara Del Rey & Amazing Kong** via DQ ... Champion **MsChif** pinned

**Wesna Basic** ... **Jetta** beat **Daffney** ... **Daizee Haze** pinned **Rayna Von Tash** ... **Jessie McKay** beat **Kellie Skater**, **Jennifer Blake**, **Melanie Cruise** in a four-way ... **Nikki Roxx & Ariel** beat **Lexie Fyfe & Malia Hosaka** ... **Rain** pinned **Tenille** ... **Sara Del Rey & Amazing Kong** beat **Serena Deeb & Mercedes Martinez** ... **Cheerleader Melissa** beat **Wesna Basic** via kayo ... **Portia Perez & Nicole Matthews** beat **Ashley Lane & Nevaeh** to win the tag team title ... Champion **MsChif** defeated **LuFisto**. (05-03-09)

—Dave Prazak

**BERWYN**—SHIMMER at the Eagles Club: **Rachel Summerlyn & Rayna Von Tash** beat **Sassy Stephie & Kimberly Kash** ... **Nikki Roxx** beat **Cat Power** ... **Amber O'Neal** pinned **Tenille** ... **Daffney** beat **Melanie Cruise** ... **Sara Del Rey** pinned **Madison Eagles** ... **LuFisto** beat **Kellie Skater** ... **Nicole Matthews** vs. **Daizee Haze** ended in a 20-minute draw ... **Amazing Kong** pinned **Mercedes Martinez** ... Tag team champions **Ashley Lane & Nevaeh** beat **Rain & Jetta** in a two-out-of-three falls match ... **Wesna Basic** pinned **Cheerleader Melissa** ... Champion **MsChif** beat **Serena Deeb** ... **Kellie Skater** pinned **Jessie McKay** ... **Lexie Fyfe & Malia Hosaka** beat **Tenille & Rayna Von Tash** ... **Jennifer Blake** pinned **Amber O'Neal** ... **Mercedes Martinez** beat **Madison Eagles** ... **Rain & Jetta** beat **Nikki Roxx & Ariel** ... **Serena Deeb** pinned **Cat Power** ... **Daizee Haze** pinned **Nicole Matthews** ... **Portia Perez** beat **Allison Danger** in a streetfight ... **Wesna Basic** pinned **LuFisto** ... **Sara Del Rey & Amazing Kong** beat **MsChif & Cheerleader Melissa**. (05-02-09)

—Dave Prazak

## INDIANA

**EVANSVILLE**—WWE Smackdown/ECW at Roberts Stadium: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Tyson Kidd** ... **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Finlay** ... **John Morrison** beat **Shelton Benjamin** ... **C.M. Punk** beat **Umaga** via DQ ... **Eve & Gail Kim** beat **Layla El & Natalya** ... **Christian & Tommy Dreamer** beat **Jack Swagger & Mark Henry** ... Intercontinental champion **Rey Mysterio Jr.** beat **Chris Jericho** ... World champion **Edge** beat **Jeff Hardy**. (05-11-09)

—Larry Csonka

**FORT WAYNE**—WWE Smackdown/ECW at the Memorial Coliseum: **Evan Bourne** beat **Tyson Kidd** ... **Finlay** defeated **Vladimir Kozlov** ... **John Morrison** beat **Shelton Benjamin** ... **Gail Kim & Eve Torres** defeated **Natalya & Layla El** ... **C.M. Punk**



**Rey Mysterio Jr.** humbled **Chris Jericho** with a perfectly executed 619. The I-C champ connected so solidly, the referee seemed to feel it.





No wonder Flair is finding it so hard to stay out of a wrestling ring these days. Orton, Rhodes, and DiBiase can't keep their hands off his pal Batista.

defeated Umaga via DQ ... Christian & Tommy Dreamer defeated Jack Swagger & Mark Henry ... Intercontinental champion Rey Mysterio Jr. beat Chris Jericho ... World champion Edge beat Jeff Hardy. (05-10-09)

—Randy Hobbs

## IOWA

DAVENPORT—Pro Wrestling Next Live at Beyond the Baseline: Zero Gravity and Samuray Del Sol defeated Nick Brubaker and The Hybrids ... Zach Gowan beat Juice Robinson ... Tyler Black & Krotch defeated Marek Brave & Jimmy Jacobs ... Hunter Matthews defeated Dewey Dawson in a no-DQ match ... Jordan McEntire defeated Knight Wagner & Mia Martinez in a handicap match ... NWA Iowa State champion Shane Hollister defeated Arl Cannon ... The Phoenix Twins vs. The Northstar Express ended in a double-DQ ... Danny Daniels pinned The Mississippi Madman to become the new heavyweight champion. (05-15-09)

—Brian Kelley

## KENTUCKY

LOUISVILLE—WWE Raw at Freedom Hall: Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Jamie Noble ... Kelly Kelly won a seven-Divas battle royal to become the number-one contender ... Santino Marella beat Chavo Guerrero Jr. ... Unified tag team champions Carlito & Primo Colon beat Brian Kendrick & Goldust ... U.S. champion Montel Vontavious Porter beat Matt Hardy ... Vickie Guerrero beat Santina Marella to become "Miss WrestleMania" ... Batista & John Cena beat Legacy (Cody Rhodes, Ted DiBiase Jr., & Randy Orton) in a handicap match. (05-18-09)

—Frank Krewda

CAVE CITY—Ultimate Championship Wrestling at the Factory Dance Hall: Mitch Ryder beat Big E. Fields via DQ ... Sinn-D beat Diane Von Hoffman to win the women's championship ... Jack Daniels

defeated Doug Vines in a no-DQ match ... Heavyweight champion Jon Roc beat J.D. Thunder in a best-of-three-falls match ... Jeff Crowe defeated Chase Stevens to become the number-one contender. (05-01-09)

—Terry England

CORBIN—TNA at the Southeastern Kentucky Agricultural Center: Eric Young defeated Kiyoshi ... Knockouts champion Angelina Love beat ODB ... Sheik Abdul Bashir defeated Consequences Creed ... Abyss beat Kip James ... Team 3-D (Brothers Ray & Devon) & Jeff Jarrett beat Beer Money Inc. (Robert Roode & James Storm) & Booker T. (05-01-09)

—Richard Gray

## MASSACHUSETTS

BOSTON—Ring of Honor at the Boston University Case Gym: Bobby Dempsey & Alex Payne beat Brandon Bay & Ray Kajima ... Max Bauer defeated Andy Ridge ... Jaleel Patel beat Matt Davis ... Grizzly Redwood defeated Ernie Osiris ... Delirious beat Ricky Reyes ... Jay Briscoe vs. Necro Butcher ended in a no-contest ... Kevin Steen beat Davey Richards in an anything-goes match ... Bryan Danielson beat Sonjay Dutt and Eddie Edwards in a triple-threat match ... Heavyweight champion Jerry Lynn beat Chris Hero. (05-08-09)

—Calvin Wong

LOWELL—Chaotic Wrestling at the Polish American Veterans Club: New England champion Demon Ortiz beat Scott Reed ... Tommaso Ciampa & Max Bauer beat Reginald Heresy & Orlin Goodspeed ... Sledge beat Elia Makropoulos ... Danny E. & Antonio T. defeated Brian Fury & Mikaze to win the tag team title ... Chase Del Monte defeated Eric Andretti ... Brian Milonas beat Tony Omega ... Rick Fuller defeated Alex Arion in a lumberjack match. (05-01-09)

—Dave Ratty

## MICHIGAN

GRAND RAPIDS—WWE Smackdown/ECW at Van Andel Arena: Evan Bourne defeated Tyson Kidd ... Vladimir Kozlov beat Finlay ... John Morrison beat Shelton Benjamin ... Gail Kim & Eve Torres defeated Natalya & Layla ... C.M. Punk beat Umaga via DQ ... ECW champion Christian vs. Jack Swagger ended in a no-contest ... Tommy Dreamer & Christian beat Mark Henry & Jack Swagger ... Intercontinental champion Rey Mysterio Jr. beat Chris Jericho ... World champion Edge beat Jeff Hardy. (05-09-09)

—Tom Bobo

## NEW JERSEY

TRENTON—TIWF at the Showplex Arena: Sgt. Payne beat A.C. Styles ... Mike Kelly defeated The Outlaw ... Way Cool defeated Chico Mendoza in an anything-goes match ... Devon Day wrestled Da' Knockout Kid to a double-countout ... Fuzion defeated The Destroyers ... Royal Executioner beat Lawman Williams ... Kilo defeated P.K. Ripper via DQ. (05-23-09)

—Steven Hunter

BERGENFIELD—WSU & NWS annual J-Cup tournament at the Bergenfield VFW Hall: Rain defeated Brooke Carter ... Angel Orsini defeated Annie Social ... Trixie Lynn defeated Jennifer Cruz ... Miss April defeated Roxie Cotton ... Rain defeated Miss April ... Angel Orsini defeated Trixie Lynn ... Giant Silva defeated J.D. Smoothie, Boris Nobika, Soul Assassin #1, Fuego Calderon, & Helter Skelter in a handicap match ... WSU champion Mercedes Martinez defeated Jana ... Angel Orsini defeated Rain to win the J-Cup. (05-10-09)

—Donald Leong

## NEW MEXICO

LAS CRUCES—WWE Smackdown/ECW at the Pan American Center: Intercontinental champion Rey Mysterio Jr. beat Chris Jericho ... John Morrison defeated Shelton Benjamin ... Gail Kim & Eve Torres defeated Layla El & Alicia Fox ... Vladimir Kozlov beat Finlay ... Christian & Tommy Dreamer beat Jack Swagger & Mark Henry ... C.M. Punk beat Dolph Ziggler ... Cryme Tyme (Shad Gaspard & J.T.G.) defeated Charlie Haas & Mike Knox ... World champion Edge beat Jeff Hardy. (05-24-09)

—Jake Vizcarra

RIO RANCHO—WWE Smackdown/ECW at the Santa Ana Star Center: Cryme Tyme (Shad Gaspard & J.T.G.) defeated Charlie Haas & Mike Knox ... Vladimir Kozlov beat Finlay ... Tommy Dreamer & Christian beat Jack Swagger & Mark Henry ... Intercontinental champion Rey Mysterio Jr. defeated Dolph Ziggler and C.M. Punk in a three-way ... John Morrison beat Shelton Benjamin ... World champion Edge defeated Jeff Hardy. (05-23-09)

—Teircio Trujillio

## NEW YORK

BUFFALO—WWE Raw at the HSBC Arena: Santina Marella & Kelly Kelly beat Beth Phoenix & Rosa Mendes ... Randy Orton vs. Shane McMahon ended in a no-contest



... Kofi Kingston defeated Matt Hardy ... Cody Rhodes beat U.S. champion Montel Vontavious Porter in a non-title match ... Mickie James beat Divas champion Maryse in a non-title match ... Ted DiBiase Jr. beat Batista via DQ ... Carlito Colon beat Brian Kendrick ... Shane McMahon vs. Legacy (Randy Orton, Cody Rhodes, & Ted DiBiase Jr.) ended in a no-contest. (05-04-09)

—Dan Murphy

**NEW YORK**—Smackdown at Madison Square Garden: Mike Knox beat Ricky Ortiz ... John Morrison defeated Shelton Benjamin ... Jeff Hardy beat Rey Mysterio Jr., Chris Jericho, and Kane to become the number-one contender for the WWE World championship ... U.S. champion Montel Vontavious Porter beat Dolph Ziggler ... C.M. Punk beat World champion Edge in a non-title match. (05-01-09)

—Michael Weiss

## NORTH CAROLINA

**FAYETTEVILLE**—TNA at the Crown Coliseum: X division champion Suicide beat Kyoshi ... Madison Rayne defeated Daffney ... Eric Young beat Kip James ... Jeff Jarrett & Daniels beat Beer Money Inc. (Robert Roode & James Storm) ... Rhino beat Kip James ... Legends champion A.J. Styles beat Booker T. (05-17-09)

—Doug LaRue

**GREENVILLE**—TNA at D.H. Conley High School: X division champion Suicide beat Kiyoshi ... Madison Rayne defeated Daffney ... Eric Young beat Sheik Abdul Bashir ... Jeff Jarrett & Daniels beat Beer Money Inc. (Robert Roode & James Storm) ... Rhino beat Kip James ... Legends champion A.J. Styles beat Booker T. (05-16-09)

—Jeff Ruoss

## OHIO

**CINCINNATI**—WWE Smackdown at the U.S. Bank Arena: John Morrison & Cryme Tyme (Shad Gaspard & JTG) beat Shelton Benjamin, Charlie Haas, & Ricky Ortiz ... Michelle McCool beat Gail Kim to become the number-one contender for the Women's championship ... C.M. Punk beat Chris Jericho via DQ ... Dolph Ziggler defeated R-Truth ... Jeff Hardy beat World champion Edge in a non-title match. (05-22-09)

—Joe Rogan

**CINCINNATI**—ECW at the U.S. Bank Arena: ECW champion Christian beat Paul Burchill ... Zack Ryder defeated Adam Green ... David Hart Smith beat Finlay. (05-19-09)

—J.P. Piser

**DAYTON**—WWE Smackdown at the Nutter Center: Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Paul Burchill ... John Morrison & C.M. Punk defeated Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas ... Jeff Hardy defeated Ricky Ortiz ... Melina & Gail Kim beat Michelle McCool & Alicia Fox ... Dolph Ziggler beat Jimmy Wang Yang ... R-Truth defeated Mike Knox ... World champion Edge vs. Chris Jericho ended in a no-contest. (05-15-09)

—Matt Kattler



**DAYTON**—ECW at the Nutter Center: Mark Henry defeated Tommy Dreamer ... Finlay beat Tyson Kidd via DQ ... Vladimir Kozlov beat Chad Collyer. (05-12-09)

—Diego Rodriguez

**COLUMBUS**—WWE Superstars at the Nationwide Arena: Intercontinental champion Rey Mysterio Jr. beat Shelton Benjamin ... ECW champion Christian beat Mark Henry ... The Big Show vs. Hornswoggle ended in a no-contest. (05-14-09)

—Richard Trionfo

**COLUMBUS**—WWE Raw at the Nationwide Arena: Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Jamie Noble ... Legacy (Cody Rhodes & Ted DiBiase Jr.) beat Batista via DQ ... Mickie James & Kelly Kelly defeated Maryse & Jillian Hall ... Brian Kendrick beat Carlito Colon ... The Miz beat John Cena in an exhibition match ... Santina Marella defeated Beth Phoenix ... Montel Vontavious Porter & Kofi Kingston beat William Regal & Matt Hardy ... WWE champion Randy Orton beat Batista via DQ. (05-11-09)

—Matt Kronmiller

**YOUNGSTOWN**—WWE Raw at the Chevy Centre: Mickie James beat Divas champion Maryse in a non-title match ... Chavo Guerrero Jr. beat Festus ... Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Jamie Noble ... The Miz defeated Kofi Kingston ... U.S. champion Montel Vontavious Porter beat William Regal ... Matt Hardy defeated Goldust ... Unified tag team champions Carlito & Primo Colon defeated Legacy (Cody Rhodes & Ted DiBiase Jr.) ... John Cena & Batista beat Randy Orton & The Big Show. (05-09-09)

—Edward Rice

## OKLAHOMA

**OKLAHOMA CITY**—TNA at the Myriad Arena: X division champion Suicide beat Eric Young ... Knockouts champion Angelina Love defeated Taylor Wilde ... Rhino beat Sheik Abdul Bashir ... Lethal Consequences (Jay Lethal & Consequences Creed) beat Beer Money Inc. (Robert Roode & James Storm) ... Abyss defeated Matt Morgan ... Samoa Joe beat Scott Stelner. (05-21-09)

—Tyler Cordingley

## PENNSYLVANIA

**ERIE**—WWE Raw at the Tullio Arena: Kofi Kingston defeated Chavo Guerrero Jr. ... Sheamus O'Shaunessy beat Jamie Noble ... The Miz beat Festus ... U.S. champion Montel Vontavious Porter defeated William Regal ... Matt Hardy beat Goldust ... Divas champion Maryse beat Mickie James ... Unified tag team champions Primo & Carlito Colon beat Legacy (Cody Rhodes & Ted DiBiase Jr.) ... John Cena & Batista defeated Randy Orton & The Big Show. (05-08-09)

—Dan Anysz

**PITTSBURGH**—WWE Smackdown at the Mellon Arena: Finlay beat Zack Ryder ... Mike Knox beat R-Truth ... Michelle McCool defeated Gail Kim ... John Morrison beat Charlie Haas ... C.M. Punk beat World champion Edge via countout ... The Great Khali beat Dolph Ziggler via DQ ... Jeff Hardy defeated Chris Jericho. (05-08-09)

—Gardner Semmelman

**PITTSBURGH**—ECW at the Mellon Arena: Evan Bourne defeated Tyson Kidd ... Vladimir Kozlov beat Jesse Guilmette ...



Hardy has shown plenty of spirit and fight in his feud with Edge, but it was the nine-time champion that came out on top once again in Rosemont.



ECW champion **Christian** vs. **Mark Henry** ended in a no-contest ... **Jack Swagger** & **Mark Henry** defeated **Christian** & **Tommy Dreamer**.  
(05-05-09)

—Richard Trionfo

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**FLORENCE**—TNA at the Florence Civic Center: X division champion **Suicide** beat **Kiyoshi** ... **Madison Rayne** beat **Daffney** ... **Rhino** defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** ... **Jeff Jarrett** & **Daniels** defeated **Beer Money Inc.** (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) ... **Eric Young** beat **Kip James** ... Legends champion **A.J. Styles** defeated **Booker T**.  
(05-15-09)

—Kenny Graddick

**ALLENTOWN**—WXW C-4 at Mountainville Hall: **Tommy Suede** won a battle royal ... **A.C. Sledge** & **Mr. Harrison** defeated **John The Man** & **Rex Taylor** ... **Flash** defeated **N.T.C.** ... **Tuck Hanson** pinned **E.J. Risk** ... **Havoc** beat **Eric Cobian** in a street fight ... **Sabian** defeated **V.S.K.** ... **John Bane** defeated **Wigeezy** ... **Tommy Suede** beat **A.J. Sabotage** ... **Afa Jr.** beat **E.J. Risk** ... **Devon Moore** pinned **Kekoa The Flyin' Hawaiian** ... Ultimate heavyweight champion **Billy Dream** pinned **Campeon International** champion **Big Joe Gomez** in a title-vs.-title match.  
(05-02-09)

—Eric Shaffer

## TEXAS

**AMARILLO**—TNA at the Amarillo Civic Center: **Jay Lethal** beat **Sheik Abdul Bashir**

... Knockouts champion **Angelina Love** beat **Taylor Wilde** ... X division champion **Suicide** beat **Consequences Creed** ... **Abyss** & **Rhino** defeated **Beer Money Inc.** (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) ... **Matt Morgan** defeated **Eric Young** ... **Samoa Joe** defeated **Scott Steiner**.  
(05-22-09)

—Cliff Plontek

**GRANBURY**—Southwest Wrestling Alliance at the Reunion Grounds: **Spoiler 2000** defeated **S.B.1.** ... **Michael Perry** beat **Eric Kincade** ... **Original M.V.P.** & **Havok** beat **Chris Richter** & **M.P.W.** ... **Chuey Martinez** & **Brandon Collins** defeated **Cody Knight** & **Bobby Midnight** ... **Brent Masters** beat **Seth Shai** to win the Heritage championship ... Heavyweight champion **Nobe Bryant** beat **Mike Foxx**.  
(05-16-09)

—Kokina Lynn

## UTAH

**SALT LAKE CITY**—WWE Raw at The E Center: **Goldust** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **The Miz** beat **Santino Marella** ... **Sheamus O'Shaunessy** beat **Brian Kendrick** ... Unified tag team champions **Primo** & **Carlito Colon** defeated **Legacy** (**Cody Rhodes** & **Ted DiBiase Jr.**) ... **Maryse** & **Beth Phoenix** defeated **The Bella Twins** (**Nikki** & **Brie**) ... U.S. champion **Montel Vontavious Porter** defeated **William Regal** and **Kofi Kingston** in a triple-threat match ... **John Cena** & **Batista** beat **The Big Show** & **Randy Orton**.  
(05-23-09)

—Tyler Clinton

**SANDY**—American Xtreme Wrestling at Club 90: **Ca\$\$idy** defeated **Kendall Rush** ... **Morgan** defeated **Nevaeh Lee** ... **Ca\$\$idy** defeated **Tony Mann** ... **Super Destroyer** defeated **Vicente Negro** ... **Super Destroyer** defeated **Dallas Murdock** ... **Mach Martinez**, **Khan Kussion**, & **Los Love Machines** (**El Gato Verde** & **Chip**) defeated **Jagger Lane**, **Tristan Gallo**, **Mysterioso**, & **Super Crazy** in an eight-man tag elimination match.  
(05-03-09)

—Cameron Nielsen

## WEST VIRGINIA

**BERKELEY SPRINGS**—Covey Promotions at BSHS Gym: **Krazy T** pinned **Christopher Saint** ... **Rob Vegas** beat **Ace Montana** via DQ ... **Bad Boy Buck** pinned **Trevor Allyn** ... **Jimmy Dream** beat **Draven**, **Thomas Rodriguez**, and **Crazil Shea** in a ladder match to become the new cruiserweight champion ... **Bad Company** defeated **The Morgan County Regulators** for the tag team championship ... **Ray Smooth** pinned **Griffen** ... Heavyweight champion **Tatanka** pinned **Bazooka Joe**.  
(04-25-09)

—Cody Covey

**WHEELING**—WWE Raw at the WesBanco Arena: **Mickie James** beat Divas champion **Maryse** in a non-title match ... **Sheamus O'Shaunessy** beat **Jamie Noble** ... **The Miz** defeated **Kofi Kingston** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Festus** ... U.S. champion **Montel Vontavious Porter** beat **William Regal** ... Unified tag team champions **Primo** & **Carlito Colon** defeated **Legacy** (**Cody Rhodes** & **Ted DiBiase Jr.**) ... **Matt Hardy** beat **Goldust** ... **Batista** & **John Cena** beat **Randy Orton** & **The Big Show**.  
(05-10-09)

—Gary Graham

**HUNTINGTON**—TNA at the Big Sandy Superstore Arena: **Eric Young** defeated **Kiyoshi** ... **B.G. James** beat **Brutus Magnus** ... Knockouts champion **Angelina Love** beat **ODB** ... **Consequences Creed** defeated **Sheik Abdul Bashir** ... **Abyss** beat **Kip James** ... **Team 3-D** (**Brothers Ray** & **Devon**) & **Jeff Jarrett** defeated **Beer Money Inc.** (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) & **Booker T**.  
(05-02-09)

—Richard Gray

## INTERNATIONAL

### CANADA

**CAMPBELLTON, NEW BRUNSWICK**—Main Stream Wrestling from the Civic Centre: **Kyle Kruze** pinned **Dennis Diamond** ... **Short Sleeve Sampson** defeated **Kyle Sebastian** ... **Vance Nevada** defeated **Bee Machine** ... Heavyweight champion **Grimez** defeated **The Mauler** ... **Grimez** won an eight-man battle royal.  
(05-04-09)

—James Harnish □



# PWI classic

From the January 1990 issue of *Sports Review Wrestling*



## "MACHO KING" SAVAGE HIS LAST CHANCE AT GLORY?

Nearly 20 years before Montel Vontavious Porter found himself on the threshold of WWE glory, Savage was in the same position. But will WWE give MVP as many chances as it gave the "Macho Man" to reach the apex?

TEXT BY **DAVE ROSENBAUM**

**L**ET'S FACE IT, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, your recent record stinks. And by now, it's become obvious: Before you were crowned "King Of The WWF," you couldn't buy a win; after you were crowned, you couldn't buy a win.

Even on that glorious night at the Cumberland County Civic Center in Portland, Maine, when you and Sensational Sherri were crowned "King" and "Queen," you were pinned by Hogan for the umpteenth time.

Your reign as royalty has been ignominious, and has had little effect on your performance in and out of the ring.

So how can you call yourself "Macho King," Savage?

\*\*\*

Incredible, isn't it, how a man can go from the top of the mountain to the depths of the valley so very quickly? On April 2, 1989, in Atlantic City, Randy Savage entered the ring for WrestleMania V as WWF World champion. He had been champion since WrestleMania





Savage did all he could to provoke Hogan in to a rematch for the title. Although he would get many chances, the "Macho King" could never muster up a win against the "Hulkster."

IV, and was given a solid shot at holding off former World champion Hulk Hogan.

Then he failed to put away Hogan with a successful flying elbowsmash from the top rope and hasn't been the same since. He and Zeus were humbled by Hogan and Brutus Beefcake at SummerSlam '89. Since then, Hogan and Beefcake have individually shattered Savage's present-day title hopes.

Which brings us to the reason why Savage calls himself "Macho King." Basically, it's all he has left. He is holding on to his meaningless title—first created by Bobby Heenan for Harley Race and since handed down to Haku and Hacksaw

Duggan—like Ted DiBiase grasps his "Million-Dollar Belt."

To Savage, this is his last chance at glory. But is it a reasonable chance, or merely a desperate way of remaining in the spotlight?

His record from mid-August to early-October was simply astounding. Savage wrestled Hogan 20 times during that period and lost *every time*. Savage couldn't even eke out a win by disqualification. Even Sensational Sherri's interference wasn't enough to give Savage a less-embarrassing loss by disqualification.

And there was a time when Beefcake wouldn't have been a match for Savage. He shouldn't be now. Beefcake, though much improved,



Even with the help of manager Sensational Sherri, "Macho King" Savage couldn't beat Hogan. The WWF champion always seemed to be a step ahead of both Sherri and Savage.



Like most WWF "Kings" before him, Savage was unable to win the World championship. Perhaps he should have spent more time finding a way to beat Hogan and less time basking in his kingship.

can't match Savage in the scientific and aerial skills departments. He lacks the "Macho Man's" stamina and experience. He is, at best, a strong brawler with plenty of determination and courage.



**January 1990**

**NWA**

World Champion: Ric Flair

1. Lex Luger
2. The Great Muta
3. Sting
4. Terry Funk
5. Brian Pillman
6. Steve Williams
7. Tom Zenk
8. Tommy Rich
9. Mike Rotundo
10. Sid Vicious

**WWF**

World Champion: Hulk Hogan

1. The Ultimate Warrior
2. Randy Savage
3. Curt Hennig
4. Rick Rude
5. Dusty Rhodes
6. Brutus Beefcake
7. Roddy Piper
8. Hacksaw Duggan
9. Bad News Brown
10. Dino Bravo

**AWA**

World Champion: Larry Zbyszko

1. Greg Gagne
2. Sgt. Slaughter
3. Jonnie Stewart
4. Paul Diamond
5. Baron Von Raschke
6. The Russian Brute
7. Kokina Maximus
8. Akio Sato
9. The Unknown Soldier
10. Tommy Jammer

**TAG TEAMS**

1. Michael Hayes & Jim Garvin
2. Demolition
3. The Road Warriors
4. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson
5. Mike Enos & Wayne Bloom
6. The Skyscrapers
7. The Bushwhackers
8. The Midnight Express
9. The Rock 'n' Roll Express
10. Jimmy Golden & Brian Lee

**MOST POPULAR**

1. Hulk Hogan
2. Ric Flair
3. The Ultimate Warrior
4. Sting
5. Roddy Piper
6. Brutus Beefcake
7. Rick Steiner
8. Dusty Rhodes
9. Hacksaw Duggan
10. Eric Embry



Even his former manager, Miss Elizabeth, couldn't stand what Savage had become. She was so repulsed by the "Macho Man's" futility that she aligned herself with Hogan, Savage's arch-nemesis.

Perhaps determination and courage are what Savage lacks most of all. One year ago, he was a happy champion. He had the title, Hogan's friendship, the fans' cheers, and the love of the beautiful Elizabeth. Now he has nothing. He has been sapped of the energy that feeds his body. He is lost.



For all Savage's flaws, a lack of persistence was not one of them. Savage continually tried to find a way to reclaim the title, but it wouldn't be until April 5, 1992, when he defeated Ric Flair, that Savage would become a world champion again.



But this is not a story about how Savage needs Elizabeth. It is not about how he must change his ways and become a fan favorite once again. Savage needs a way to get back on track. And if being "King" of the WWF helps him—although the evidence is to the contrary—his methods can't be questioned.

Being "King," however, has not had positive effects on the careers of the men who have worn the crown. A WWF "King" has never held a major title. Race was consumed with the crown and came back too early from a serious injury. Haku battled for the WWF World title and came up short. Duggan's reign was short and undistinguished.

"Falling for Heenan's line about being 'King' was the worst mistake I ever made," Race said. "The worst thing that can happen to a man in this sport is getting consumed with your own ego, and that 'King' thing is all about ego, nothing else. It's something to grasp onto when there's nothing else, but it misdirects your energy. I once believed that being 'King' meant something, but the only things that ever meant anything were my NWA World titles."

These are words of wisdom from a retired veteran superstar who knows. So now our question can finally be asked: Is being "King" Savage's last chance at glory?

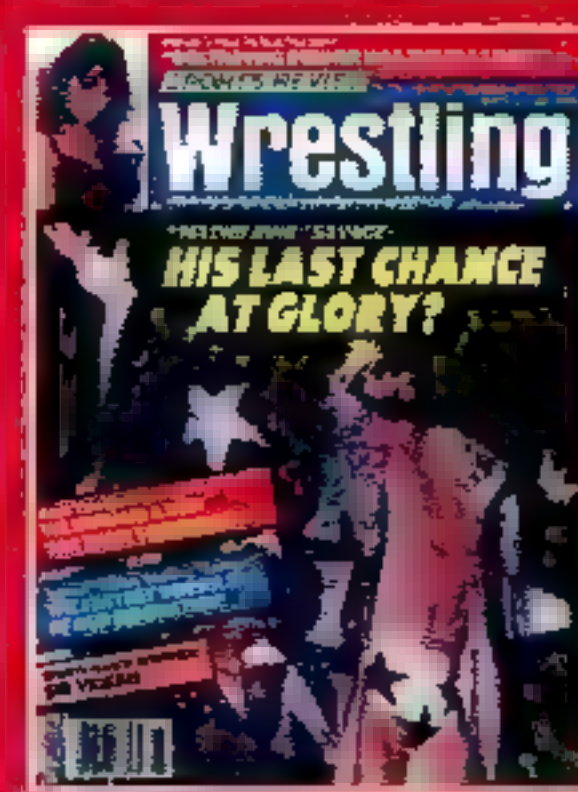
No, because it does not give him a chance at glory. Perhaps one day, Savage will get back on the title track. When that day arrives, he will no longer be "King." He will no longer be managed by Sensational Sherri.

He will have rediscovered the career track that made him champion in the first place. Savage still has the ability. He should be at the peak of his career.

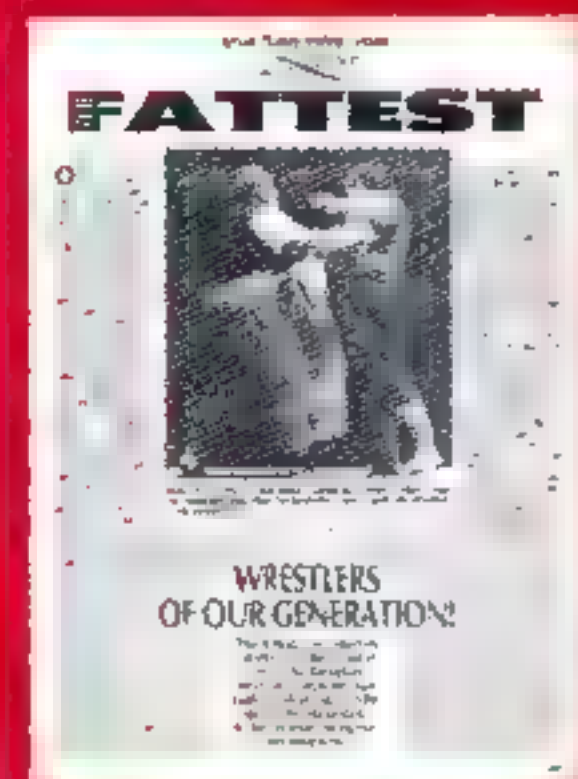
The "Macho Man's" day will come again. But "Macho King's" recent performances have been a royal shame. □

## Sports Review Wrestling, January 1990

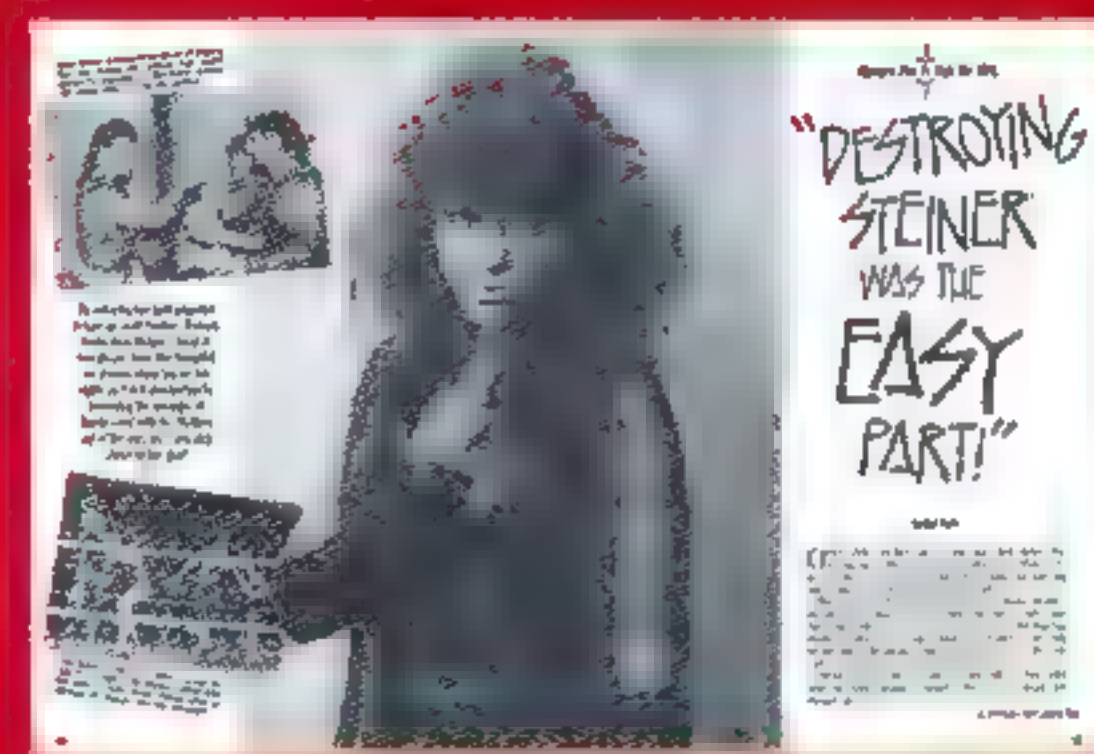
**The Cover:** **Macho King** Randy Savage was at the top of the wrestling world when he won the WWF World title at WrestleMania IV. But after losing it at WrestleMania V, his career took a nosedive. He added "King" to his name, changed managers, and yet still could not beat Hulk Hogan. This was his last shot to redeem himself and prove he deserved to wear the title once again.



**Holy Cow!** In this special Turkey Stuffing section, *Sports Review Wrestling* examined the fattest wrestlers in the sport. Everyone from the 600-pound Benny McGuire to Abdullah the Butcher was examined in this nine-page section. The point wasn't to make fun of these giants, but to show that having some extra girth didn't limit wrestlers to a power game.



**Voodoo Woman:** Robin Green, better known as Woman, played the shy and reserved girl in the front row. Getting Rick Steiner to notice her was the first step in her plan. Once she had her claws dug deep into the "Dogfaced Gremlin," she began step two—total domination of the NWA.



**Time For A New Tournament:** Once again, the AWA found itself embroiled in title controversy. This time, it was over the World tag team championship. Fans were up in arms over how The Destruction Crew clearly benefited from the help of Sheik Adnan Al-Kaissie and Kokina Maximus to win the one-night tournament and claim the title. We called for an immediate re-do of the entire journey.



**Some Thanks ...** How did we repay our loyal readers for buying the January 1990 issue of *Sports Review Wrestling*? By pointing a big fat finger in their faces in our monthly "We Accuse" column. Our bone of contention? Wrestling federations allow the fans—who wear their biases on their sleeves—to sway critical business decisions. Sure, the feds were to blame for allowing themselves to be influenced, but how dare you cheer or boo your favorites!





# between falls

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns.

Send letters to:  
BETWEEN FALLS Box 1148, Ft. Washington, PA 19034  
Or you can e-mail your comments to  
prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com

## SUBSCRIBERS SPEAK OUT



Anytime we give subscribers an opportunity to voice their opinions on wrestling's hottest issues, the result is always the same: We get a ton of intelligent, passionate feedback. The 2009 "PWI Poll" (June 2009) was no exception.

"We always hear that Danielson is the best pound-for-pound wrestler," wrote Stan Hall of Tampa, Florida. "But wish more readers had voted for Shelley. Danielson's great, but Shelley is just as good and does it on a bigger stage in TNA. I bet next year he overtakes Danielson."

(Editor's Note: Shelley finished just a percentage point behind Danielson in the best pound-for-pound wrestler category.)

After Ric Flair's retirement at WM 24, many wondered which superstar would be next to leave. Thirty-seven percent of our subscribers felt Shawn Michaels would be next to walk away. Two percentage points behind HBK was Sting. "It was a tough choice between the two," wrote Matt Walters of Newark, Delaware. "Sting is older but he's been in the heat for the TNA World title. Michaels just doesn't seem like he wants to chase a belt anymore."



Photo by George Napolitano

Batista clearly has the drive to succeed, but reader Craig Brown of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, wonders if the "The Animal's" 40-year-old body can support his ambition.

### TIME RUNNING OUT

I just finished reading the Batista story ("Batista Time! Nothing Can Go Wrong For 'The Animal' Now") in the August 2009 issue of *PWI* and I am going to have to disagree with your assessment. I feel like Batista's time to reign as a world champion has come and gone. He is getting too old and his injuries are only going to plague him

the longer he tries to hang in there.

His ability and determination have never been in question. The real thing to look at is whether his body can hang in there with his desire to win. I just can't imagine him having a sustained reign at the top, if he can even get back there at all.

CRAIG BROWN  
Kennett Square, PA





Angelina Love may not have the pure wrestling ability or power of Awesome Kong, but Steve Davis of Cusseta, Georgia, feels her beauty and charisma make her a more fitting Knockouts champion.

## WHY VICKIE?

I want to start by congratulating Teddy Long on being promoted back to Smackdown. With that out of the way, what was Vince McMahon thinking when he put Vickie Guerrero on Raw?

Mark my words: Vickie will mess up Raw like she messed up Smackdown. She has already shown she does not care about what her bosses say. Heck, she changes stipulations to matches that Vince himself sets up. Where does she get off? This type of leadership will not bode well for Raw in any way.

RON SEITZ  
Edison, NJ

## A KNOCKOUT, KNOCKOUT CHAMP

It took TNA long enough to finally get it right. Say what you want about Awesome Kong, but she just didn't have that "it" factor a female champion needs. Angelina Love, on the other hand, embodies everything the Knockouts division should be: She's talented, sexy, and entertaining.

Here's to hoping this Knockout will remain on top.

STEVE DAVIS  
Cusseta, GA

## GIVE MELINA SOME CREDIT

It is hard to believe you have not given more coverage to WWE Women's champion Melina. She is an excellent wrestler and deserves more ink in your magazines.

She was a great manager who led M-N-M to three reigns as WWE tag team champions and also took Johnny Nitro (John Morrison) to the Intercontinental championship on Raw.

As a singles competitor, Melina's current reign (her third) has long since eclipsed the 100-day mark, something that took Trish Stratus until her fifth time as champion to accomplish.

Melina has the look, determination, and ability to be one of the greatest female athletes this sport has ever seen. Maybe *PWI* should finally give her the credit she deserves.

DONALD K. PRESNALL  
Salem, OR □



# PWI official ratings

For the Period Ended June 4, 2009

## TOP 10

- 1** **EDGE**  
250, Toronto, Ontario  
(1) WWE World champion
- 2** **RANDY ORTON**  
245, St. Louis, MO  
(2) WWE heavyweight champion
- 3** **CHRISTIAN**  
235, Toronto, Ontario  
(6) ECW champion
- 4** **MICK FOLEY**  
280, East Setauket, NY  
(4) TNA World champion
- 5** **BATISTA**  
290, Washington, DC  
(3) No. 1 contender: WWE heavyweight title
- 6** **BLUE DEMON JR.**  
228, Mexico City, Mexico  
(5) NWA champion
- 7** **JERRY LYNN**  
185, Minneapolis, MN  
(9) Ring of Honor champion
- 8** **JEFF HARDY**  
225, Cameron, NC  
(8) No. 1 contender: WWE World title
- 9** **MANABU NAKANISHI**  
186, Kyoto, Japan  
(-) IWGP champion
- 10** **STING**  
255, Venice Beach, CA  
(-) No. 1 contender: TNA World title



Photo by George Napolitano

Jeff Hardy

## TAG TEAMS

- 1** **CARLITO & PRIMO COLON**  
Combined weight: 438 pounds  
(1) WWE Unified tag team champions
- 2** **BROTHER DEVON & BROTHER RAY**  
Combined weight: 560 pounds  
(2) IWGP and TNA World tag team champions
- 3** **JAMES STORM & ROBERT ROODE**  
Combined weight: 495 pounds  
(3) No. 1 contenders: TNA World tag team title
- 4** **RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER**  
Combined weight: 560 pounds  
(5) NWA tag team champions
- 5** **DAVEY RICHARDS & EDDIE EDWARDS**  
Combined weight: 395 pounds  
(4) ROH tag team champions
- 6** **TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI**  
Combined weight: 454 pounds  
(9) AJPW tag team champions
- 7** **TED DIBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES**  
Combined weight: 454 pounds  
(6) No. 1 contenders: WWE Unified tag title
- 8** **TYLER REKS & JOHNNY CURTIS**  
Combined weight: 450 pounds  
(7) FCW tag team champions
- 9** **RODERICK STRONG & ERICK STEVENS**  
Combined weight: 447 pounds  
(8) FIP tag team champions
- 10** **ALEX SHELLEY & CHRIS SABIN**  
Combined weight: 435 pounds  
(10) IWGP junior tag team champions

## RAW

WWE Champion:

**RANDY ORTON**

(C) 245, St. Louis, MO

- 1—BATISTA**  
(1) 290, Washington, DC
- 2—JOHN CENA**  
(4) 240, West Newbury, MA
- 3—THE BIG SHOW**  
(3) 441, Tampa, FL
- 4—KOFI KINGSTON**  
(8) 218, Jamaica
- 5—M.V.P.**  
(5) 249, Miami, FL
- 6—TED DIBIASE JR.**  
(10) 235, Palm Springs, FL
- 7—THE MIZ**  
(-) 231, Cleveland, OH
- 8—CODY RHODES**  
(6) 219, Charlotte, NC
- 9—MATT HARDY**  
(7) 236, Cameron, NC
- 10—BRIAN KENDRICK**  
(9) 184, Venice, CA

## SMACKDOWN

World Champion:

**EDGE**

(C) 250, Toronto, Ontario

- 1—JEFF HARDY**  
(1) 225, Cameron, NC
- 2—C.M. PUNK**  
(3) 222, Chicago, IL
- 3—CHRIS JERICHO**  
(2) 226, Manhasset, NY
- 4—REY MYSTERIO JR.**  
(4) 175, San Diego, CA
- 5—UMAGA**  
(8) 350, Samoa
- 6—JOHN MORRISON**  
(6) 219, Los Angeles, CA
- 7—DOLPH ZIGGLER**  
(10) 221, Hollywood, CA
- 8—SHELTON BENJAMIN**  
(-) 248, Orangeburg, SC
- 9—R-TRUTH**  
(-) 228, Charlotte, NC
- 10—CHARLIE HAAS**  
(-) 249, Dallas, TX

## ECW

Champion:

**CHRISTIAN**

(C) 235, Toronto, Ontario

- 1—JACK SWAGGER**  
(1) 285, Perry, OK
- 2—TOMMY DREAMER**  
(4) 265, Yonkers, NY
- 3—EVAN BOURNE**  
(2) 183, St. Louis, MO
- 4—VLADIMIR KOZLOV**  
(5) 302, Moscow, Russia
- 5—TYSON KIDD**  
(-) 195, Calgary, Alberta
- 6—DAVID HART SMITH**  
(-) 260, Calgary, Alberta
- 7—FINLAY**  
(3) 233, Belfast, N. Ireland
- 8—PAUL BURCHILL**  
(-) 247, Chelsea, England
- 9—ZACK RYDER**  
(-) 214, Merrick, NY
- 10—MARK HENRY**  
(6) 392, Silsbee, TX

## TNA

World Champion:

**MICK FOLEY**

(C) 280, East Setauket, NY

- 1—STING**  
(3) 255, Venice Beach, CA
- 2—JEFF JARRETT**  
(2) 230, Nashville TN
- 3—KURT ANGLE**  
(1) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
- 4—SUICIDE**  
(5) 232, Parts Unknown
- 5—A.J. STYLES**  
(4) 215, Gainesville, GA
- 6—DANIELS**  
(6) 224, Los Angeles, CA
- 7—SAMOA JOE**  
(7) 280, Los Angeles, CA
- 8—MATT MORGAN**  
(8) 305, Fairfield, CT
- 9—JETHRO HOLLIDAY**  
(-) 245, Waxahachie, TX
- 10—KEVIN NASH**  
(-) 315, Detroit, MI



Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue, while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

**CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING:** Champion—Jake Davis; 1—Shane Shadows; 2—Hyjinx; 3—The Patriot; 4—Griffen; 5—Leslie Leatherman; 6—Bob Keller; 7—Chris Cline; 8—Robbie Paige; 9—Ian Jordan; 10—Bill Bain.

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION:** Champion—Chase Del Monte; 1—Rob Eckos; 2—Mike Reed; 3—Frederick of Hollywood; 4—Andrew Ryker; 5—Scott Wright; 6—Nick Logan; 7—Mega; 8—Bryan Logan; 9—Cha Cha Chance; 10—Matt Logan.

**FULL THROTTLE WRESTLING:** Champion—The Searcher; 1—Kevin Thorne; 2—Bob Orton Jr.; 3—Guy Smith; 4—Damian Blade; 5—Scar; 6—Curtis Payne; 7—Xavier Frost; 8—Ivan Stroganov; 9—Chico Es Loco; 10—Stryker.

**KYDA PRO WRESTLING:** Champion—Kip James; 1—Joseph Brooks; 2—John Kermion; 3—Christian York; 4—Jane; 5—Xander Maddox; 6—Uriah Condit; 7—Bazooka Joe; 8—Mark Bravura; 9—Sanchez; 10—Jimmy Z.

**MAIN STREAM WRESTLING RATINGS:** Champion—The Mauler; 1—Grimez; 2—Vance Nevada; 3—Kyle Kruze; 4—Short Sleeve Sampson; 5—Gurv Sihra; 6—Kyle Sebastian; 7—Lincoln Steen; 8—Mike Hughes; 9—Brody Steele; 10—Bee Machine.

**MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING:** Champion—Ruckus; 1—Christian York; 2—Josh Daniels; 3—Cobian; 4—The Bruiser; 5—Dino Divine; 6—Qeenan Creed; 7—Ryan McBride; 8—Teddy Stigma; 9—Stevie Richards; 10—Adam Carelle.

**PRO WRESTLING ALLIANCE:** Champion—The Atomic Dogg; 1—Prince Al Farat; 2—Matt Riviera; 3—Jeff Jett; 4—Tim Storm; 5—Mark Johnson; 6—Brandon Groom; 7—Bruiser Rick Sweetan; 8—Apoc; 9—Rich Rude; 10—Chas Cardington.

**PRO WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT:** Champion—Shane Valentine; 1—Jey Graham; 2—Julio Dinero; 3—Hyjinx; 4—Johnny Graham; 5—Shane Shadows; 6—Glen Osbourne; 7—Doink the Clown; 8—Jackpot; 9—Ian Jordan; 10—Joey Money.

**SHOWTIME ALL-STAR WRESTLING:** Champion—Kid Kash; 1—Arrick Andrews; 2—Chase Stevens; 3—Andy Douglas; 4—Flash Flanagan; 5—Rick Santel; 6—David Young; 7—Hammerjack; 8—Jesse Emerson; 9—Vordell Walker; 10—Marc Anthony.

**ULTIMATE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING:** Champion—Jon Roc; 1—Jeff Crowe; 2—Chase Stevens; 3—Justin Sane; 4—J.D. Thunder; 5—Gary Valiant; 6—Aaron Genesis; 7—Randall Shane; 8—Krazy Skillz; 9—Doug Vines; 10—Mitch Ryder.

**WEST-TEXAS WRESTLING ASSOCIATION:** Champion—El Gringo Loco; 1—Brian Blade; 2—Leo Bramblett; 3—Awesome Andy; 4—Pinky LaRue; 5—Dameon Blood; 6—Josh Murphy; 7—Superstar V; 8—Chuey Martinez; 9—Dyspare; 10—Tony Morales.

**XTREME INTENSE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING:** Champion—The D.B.A.; 1—Jaimy Cox; 2—Necro Butcher; 3—Jimmy Jacobs; 4—Mo Dred; 5—T.D.; 6—Gutter; 7—Chris McGinnis; 8—Eddie Venom; 9—Josh Raymond; 10—Levi Blue.

## RING OF HONOR

Champion:

**JERRY LYNN**

(C) 185, Minneapolis, MN

- 1—**AUSTIN ARIES**  
(1) 202, Milwaukee, WI
- 2—**TYLER BLACK**  
(3) 210, Davenport, IA
- 3—**BRYAN DANIELSON**  
(2) 185, Aberdeen, WA
- 4—**RODERICK STRONG**  
(5) 212, Tampa, FL
- 5—**JAY BRISCOE**  
(6) 205, Laurel, DE
- 6—**CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**  
(4) 240, Schaffhausen, Switz.
- 7—**COLT CABANA**  
(7) 233, Chicago, IL
- 8—**BRENT ALBRIGHT**  
(8) 202, Othello, WA
- 9—**DELIRIOUS**  
(-) 194, The Edge of Sanity
- 10—**ERICK STEVENS**  
(-) 235, Sarasota, FL

## NWA

Champion:

**BLUE DEMON JR.**

(C) 228, Mexico City, Mexico

- 1—**ADAM PEARCE**  
(1) 248, San Diego, CA
- 2—**BRENT ALBRIGHT**  
(2) 230, Tulsa, OK
- 3—**APOLLO**  
(9) 265, Ponce, Puerto Rico
- 4—**PHIL SHATTER**  
(5) 247, Paris Island, SC
- 5—**OLIVER JOHN**  
(4) 228 Sacramento, CA
- 6—**SUPER CRAZY**  
(6) 215, Hidalgo, Mexico
- 7—**MANABU NAKANISHI**  
(-) 186, Kyoto, Japan
- 8—**SCOTTY MAC**  
(8) 205, Kelowna, B.C.
- 9—**MUSCLE GANG**  
(-) 297, San Diego, California
- 10—**MIKE DIBIASE**  
(3) 220, Amarillo, TX

## JAPAN

- 1—**MANABU NAKANISHI**  
(3) 186, Kyoto, Japan  
IWGP champion
- 2—**YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**  
(1) 280, Tokyo, Japan  
AJPW Triple Crown champion
- 3—**JUN AKIYAMA**  
(2) 243, Osaka, Japan  
GHC champion
- 4—**HIROSHI TANAHASHI**  
(6) 231, Gifu, Japan
- 5—**GO SHIOZAKI**  
(-) 220, Kumamoto, Japan
- 6—**YUJI NAGATA**  
(-) 238, Chiba, Japan
- 7—**MITSU HARU MISAWA**  
(-) 242, Saitama, Japan
- 8—**TIGER MASK IV**  
(-) 192, Parts Unknown, Japan
- 9—**KAZ HAYASHI**  
(-) 183, Tokyo, Japan
- 10—**NARUKI DOI**  
(-) 181, Nara Japan

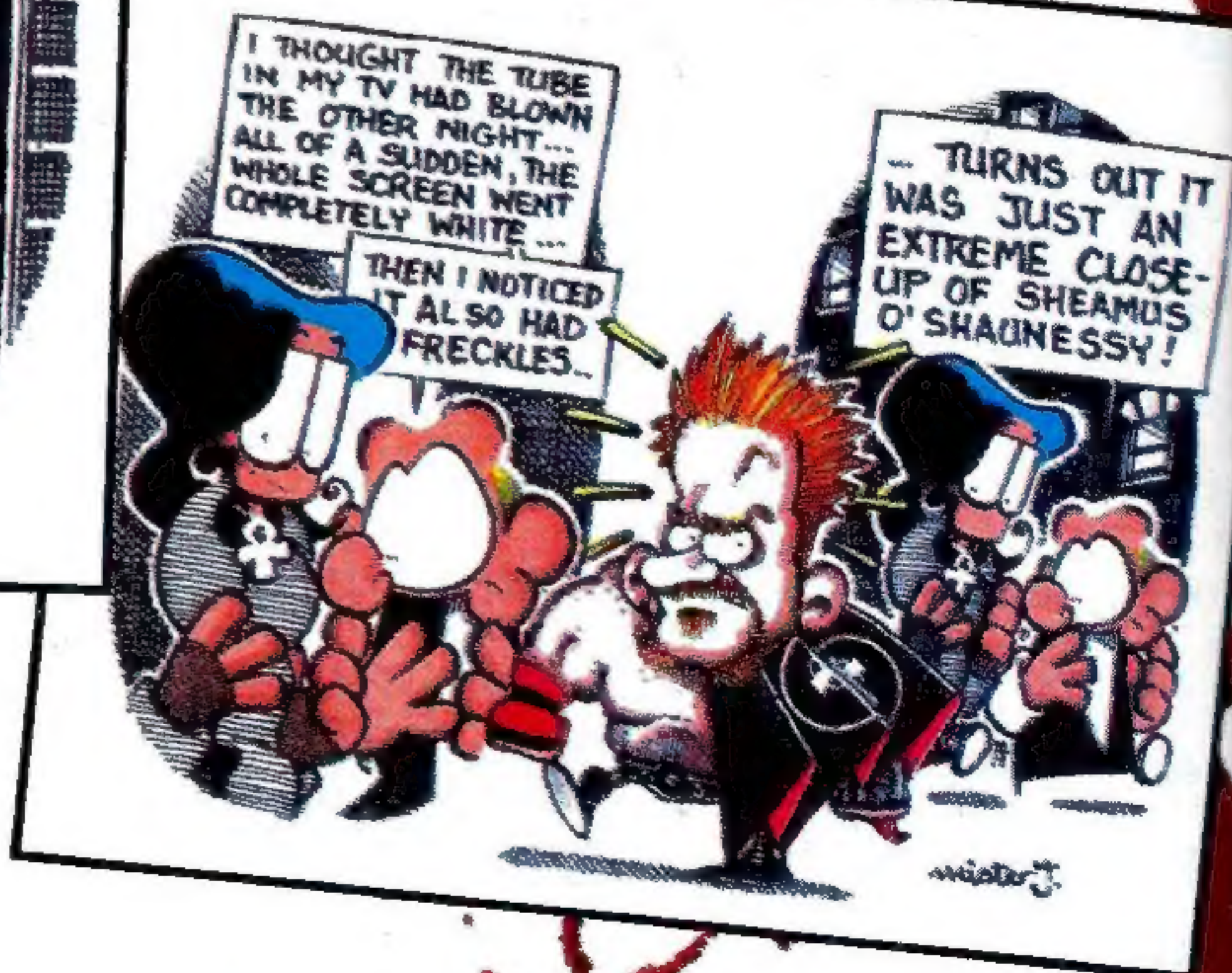
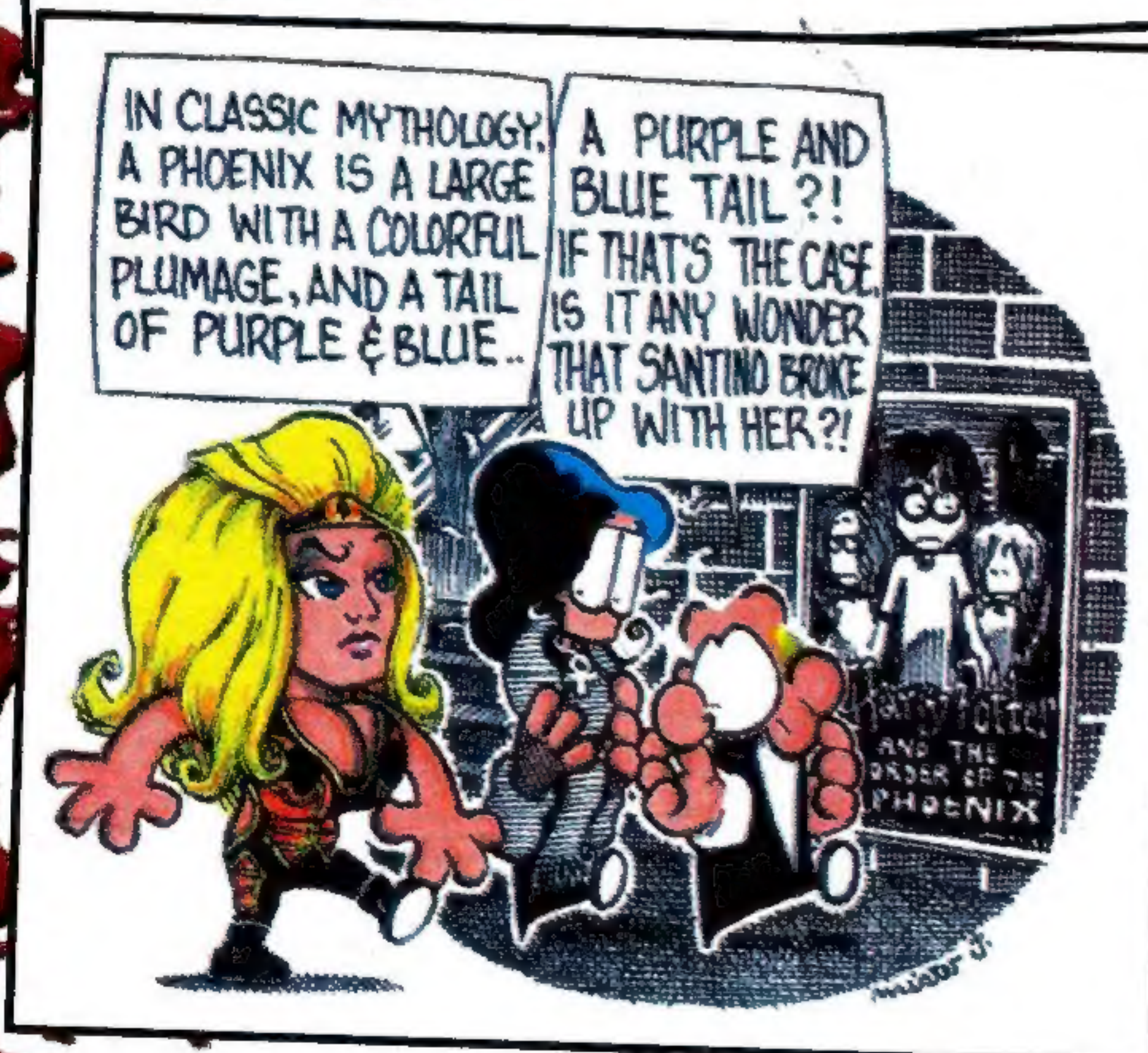
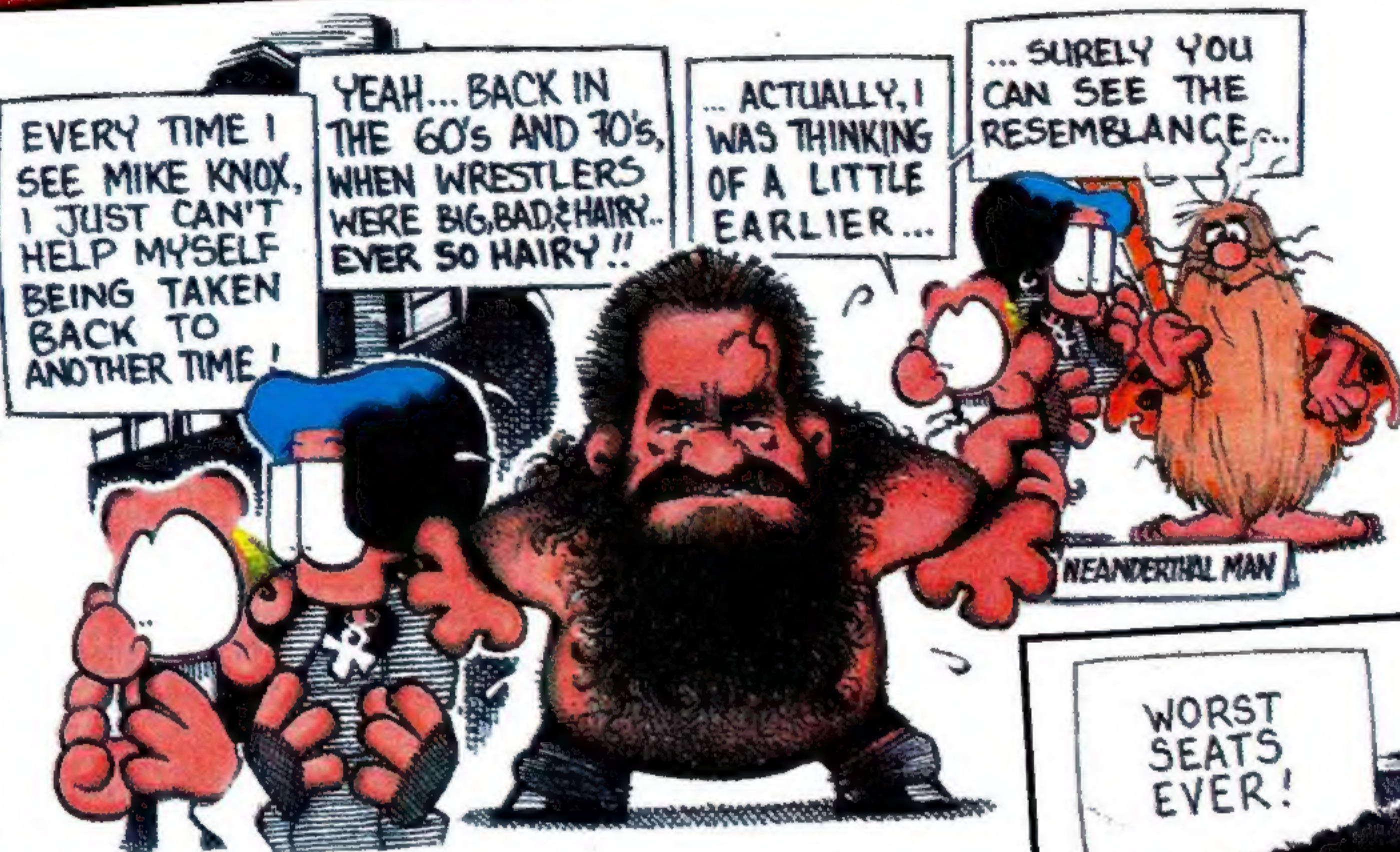
## MEXICO

- 1—**MESIAS**  
(1) 245, Bayamon, Puerto Rico
- 2—**MISTICO**  
(2) 167, Mexico City, Mexico
- 3—**AVERNO**  
(5) 174, Mexico City, Mexico
- 4—**DR. WAGNER JR.**  
(6) 216, Torreon, Mexico
- 5—**ULTIMO GUERRERO**  
(3) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
- 6—**LA PARKA JR.**  
(9) 216, Hermosillo, Mexico
- 7—**DOS CARAS JR.**  
(7) 211, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
- 8—**CHESSMAN**  
(4) 231, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico
- 9—**MEPHISTO**  
(-) 198, Mexico City, Mexico
- 10—**ALEX KOSLOV**  
(-) 190, Moscow, Russia



# Drawing Blood

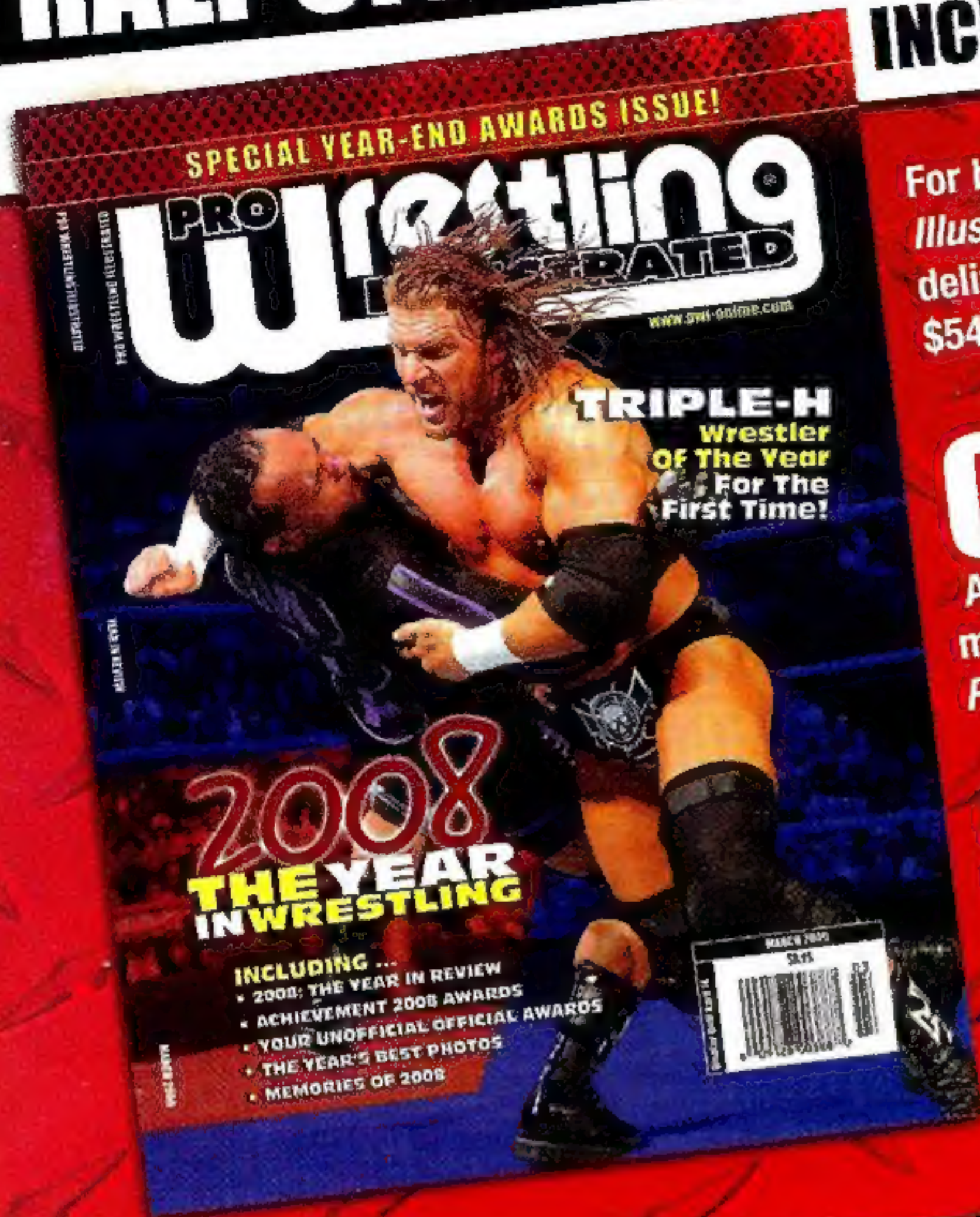
By Jason Conlan





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